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Justice for All?: The Pledge of Allegiance as a Site of Surveillance and Discipline in American  
Culture and Classrooms

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American Studies 302/03: Senior Project  
April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
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## **I. Introduction**

The first time I encountered the Pledge of Allegiance was on the first day of first grade. We were doing morning meeting on the carpet when my teacher prompted us all to stand up. Suddenly, all the students around me began speaking in unison. They all knew how to stand and what to say. I quickly copied their posture, with my hand over my heart, but the words were lost on me. I stood quietly, embarrassed and confused. I felt left out, as if there was a secret that I was the last to learn. Remembering this moment, my chest still tightens.

Like many collective rituals, the formal rituals of American patriotism, such as the Pledge of Allegiance, gain strength from their ability, at least in theory, to make individuals feel part of a whole. My feeling of being left out on that morning in first grade encouraged me to learn the words to the Pledge of Allegiance quickly, so I could once again feel included and in-the-know. Though I encountered the Pledge every school day for the next twelve years, I never again experienced such intense emotion during its recitation. In fact, the more I was expected to say the Pledge, the less it meant to me. By high school, I would stand with my hand over my heart, but would only say it if the teacher looked like they really cared that I did. My not saying it was not a protest but rather a signal of apathy. It just didn't matter to me and it was not something I gave much thought to.

This project is an exploration of the complicated relationship between Americans and the Pledge of Allegiance, a cornerstone of American patriotic ritual. It is undertaken in the hopes of better understanding the function and significance of this ritual in American culture and society today. Rather than a formal analysis of the Pledge's symbolic meaning or abstract qualities, my project investigates the Pledge as a lived experience. I use interviews with teachers to understand the way this ritual is understood, experienced, and negotiated in schools today. I argue that the

Pledge of Allegiance functions today, in the lives of many Americans, as a site of surveillance and discipline, a place where both teachers and students watch and are watched. I show that the surveillance experienced by teachers and students during this ritual has important consequences, both for the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of those individuals, and more broadly for the relationship it sets up between the citizen and the state.

The recitation of the Pledge, like other patriotic practices, has become highly ritualized in American society. Most US states have a law requiring time be given each day in public schools for the Pledge to be recited. The Pledge has a highly formalized and ceremonial nature that children learn to respect starting very young. In standing, placing a hand over one's heart, and removing one's hat, it is signaled that this practice is important and even sacred. The ubiquitous and ritualized nature of this practice makes it easy for it to be taken for granted in American society. Though most Americans today have been saying the pledge since they can remember, it is not as ancient as one might assume. The Pledge of Allegiance was written in 1891 and did not become customary to recite in schools until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the past 100 years, the Pledge has gained such popularity and significance that its recitation has become mundane. The everyday practice of this ritual often goes unquestioned and unnoticed, yet its absence (or an individual's choice not to partake) is often imparted with political meaning and viewed with judgment. This is also true of other patriotic rituals, such as the national anthem. The NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick's decision not to stand during the national anthem in 2016, and the resulting backlash, is proof of this. This project looks at the way in which individuals' experiences with and relationships to the Pledge of Allegiance both reflects and creates the meaning it holds in US society and the function it serves in American culture.

I argue that the Pledge of Allegiance functions as a site of surveillance and discipline in the lives of many Americans. I specifically focus on teachers and students- individuals that encounter and make choices about this ritual every day. I show that this ritual has historically functioned as a place of surveillance and control, and that many Americans continue to experience, view, and treat the Pledge in this way. This is not to deny the meaning that this ritual holds for many people. Rather, it is to illuminate a narrative different from the dominant framing of the Pledge, and to reveal alternative ways in which this ritual is experienced and understood. In fact, my argument makes room for the multiple ways in which the Pledge can simultaneously hold meaning for individuals while functioning as a site of surveillance and a tool of discipline in their lives.

That the Pledge can and does function as a place of surveillance and control in the lives of many Americans should be of importance to critics as well as supporters of this ritual. Surveillance has serious effects on the mind and body. The feeling of being surveilled can produce fear and anxiety, especially in children, but in adults as well. These feelings tend to induce superficial participation, where individuals comply with the physical acts of the ritual as a means of remaining inconspicuous rather than a sincere desire to participate. In this way, the surveillance present during this ritual tends to result in the disciplining of student and teacher bodies, inducing compliance with the demands of the ritual. Supporters of the Pledge must agree that it is not easy for one to reflect deeply on a ritual's significance under these conditions. It is therefore much more difficult for individuals to experience the Pledge in a meaningful way when it functions as a site of surveillance and disciplinary power. Furthermore, the fact that the way the Pledge is treated and experienced in American society often results in superficial participation and compliance is important because of the significance of the words being said

during this ritual. To stand and recite the words of the Pledge of Allegiance is to promise love, devotion, and most importantly, loyalty to the American nation-state. It is to pledge devotion to a country that continues to value the lives of straight, white, able-bodied, male, and cis-gendered Americans over others. It is to stand for a nation that does not stand for so many of its people. The weight of the words of the Pledge make even superficial participation meaningful and significant, both on an individual and collective level. As long as this ritual functions as a site of surveillance and discipline, it will continue to encourage and venerate uncritical shows of patriotism that uphold American hegemony, foster American exceptionalism, and glorify a nation-state that continues to oppress so many of its citizens.

### Method

Methodologically, I have chosen to explore the Pledge and its function in American culture through a series of semi-ethnographic interviews with Americans.<sup>i</sup> I am interested in understanding how this ritual is lived by Americans- how it is experienced and thought about day to day- rather than how it is conceived in the abstract. It is this desire to understand the Pledge as a lived experience that led me to choose ethnographic interviews as my central method of investigation. I decided to interview public school teachers, and other staff members in public schools, because these individuals are confronted with the Pledge on a daily basis. As the Pledge is mandated in public schools, teachers and public school employees are forced to think through and make decisions about this ritual much more frequently than the average American. Furthermore, teachers hold a position of power in the classroom, so their actions and behaviors during this ritual hold influence over their students. The way that students encounter and are taught to think about the Pledge in school can have important consequences for the way they

grow to understand the relationship between the citizen and the state. Schools serve as a site of civic and democratic education, where students are (hopefully) educated into the ideals of a democratic society. The way in which an important patriotic ritual, the Pledge of Allegiance, is treated and framed in public school classrooms, is therefore consequential to the way in which students are taught to understand their relationship to the state and the qualities of a good democratic citizen. It is for this reason that I have chosen to focus on the school as my site of inquiry regarding the function of the Pledge of Allegiance in American culture. I also wanted to interview students for this project, to find out how they feel about, experience, and react to the Pledge in school every day, but I was not able to get approval to interview minors in time. I regret this deeply, as I think this project could benefit from examining student resistance to the disciplinary power encountered during the Pledge.

I interviewed 15 public school employees over the course of four months for this project. I interviewed 9 public school teachers in Greenwich, Connecticut and 3 public school teachers in Poughkeepsie New York. I also interviewed two paraprofessionals in Greenwich public schools and a curriculum coordinator in a Poughkeepsie public school. I was able to get in touch with these teachers through connections I had in both school districts. My mother is a teacher in the Greenwich public schools, so she was able to put me in touch with teachers there. I also went to school in Greenwich, so I was able to interview some of my former teachers. I was put in contact with teachers in Poughkeepsie through the director of a program I work for, the Vassar Education Outreach Initiative. I met with the teachers I interviewed in the schools they work in, but out of the earshot of students, other teachers, or administrators. I asked all of the teachers I interviewed the same basic questions (which can be found in the endnotes)<sup>ii</sup>, but also asked



follow-up questions based on their answers, which differed from interview to interview. My interview questions centered on each individual's relationship to and experiences with the Pledge of Allegiance, their views on patriotism and ritual, and their treatment of the Pledge in the classroom as teachers.<sup>iii</sup>

My exploration into the function of the Pledge of Allegiance in American society frames the interview responses I have accrued with theoretical and historical analysis. I will begin by outlining a basic history of the Pledge, focusing on key moments in this ritual's history. I will then introduce the theoretical tools I will use to analyze and understand my interview responses. Next I will discuss these responses and analyze major trends they present. Finally, I will conclude by outlining the implications of my findings. Ultimately, I argue that the Pledge of Allegiance functions as a site of surveillance and a tool of disciplinary power in American classrooms and society. This serves the needs of the state by silencing dissent and promoting uncritical patriotism, thereby upholding systemic forms of injustice in American society.

## II. Key Moments

American patriotic rituals tend to have about them a sense of timelessness, a feeling that they have always been done and always will be. This sense of immortality may have something to do with Benedict Anderson's idea that nations are often constructed in such a way that they seem to "loom out of an immemorial past and... glide into a limitless future".<sup>1</sup> The historical ambiguity of American patriotic rituals lends itself both to their continuity and their importance. In this chapter, I hope to provide a brief outline of the history of the Pledge of Allegiance, beginning with its creation and formalization in the American tradition and then continuing by charting key moments in its evolution and its relevance in American culture. This history, while not comprehensive, will help provide framing for my discussion of the way that Americans relate to and experience this ritual today. Furthermore, I hope to show that the Pledge has a history of functioning as a contested site of surveillance and discipline in American society.

### Origins of the Pledge of Allegiance

The origins of the Pledge of Allegiance lie in a popular children's magazine of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *The Youth's Companion*, which had the Pledge commissioned as one part of a Columbus Day celebration it was promoting in public schools. *The Youth's Companion* was a periodical, published out of Boston, which started as an offshoot of a religious digest in 1827. It soon gained popularity in its own right later in the century as a weekly family magazine that

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<sup>1</sup>Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 12.

offered young people a taste of the world outside their own towns.<sup>2</sup> By 1892, it had almost half a million subscribers, making it one of the most popular periodicals in the country. The magazine was known for sponsoring patriotic sales and events that fostered national pride while also turning a profit. In 1888 for instance, it launched its ‘Flag Over the Schoolhouse’ program, which encouraged young readers to sell subscriptions at ten cents apiece until they had enough money to buy an American flag from the magazine for their schoolhouse.<sup>3</sup> At this time, flags were not as prevalent, especially in schools, as they are today. Alongside this campaign, the magazine also sponsored an essay contest for students on “The Patriotic Influence of the American Flag When Raised over the Public Schools.” The school with the best essay in each state would receive a flag to fly over their schoolhouse.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the magazine’s advocacy for the flying of the American flag was not purely patriotic. It sold flags and gave them away as premiums for bringing in new subscriptions, meaning that it had a financial stake in the purchase and display of the flag.

In 1891, as Chicago prepared to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Columbus’s fabled “discovery” of America with the World Columbian Exposition, owners and employees of *The Youth’s Companion* realized that they could use this celebration to their advantage. The Pledge’s connection to Columbus Day, a holiday that glorifies a man who initiated, supported, and carried out the genocide of Native peoples, foreshadows the way in which the flag and the Pledge have been used throughout history as tools of imperialism. The magazine began promoting October 12<sup>th</sup> as Columbus Day, and outlining a schedule of patriotic commemorations that would happen

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Owen Jones and Peter Meyer, *The Pledge: a history of the Pledge of Allegiance* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2010), 35.

<sup>3</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 39.

<sup>4</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 39.

in public schools across the country to accompany the celebration.<sup>5</sup> They hired Francis Bellamy, a Baptist minister who lived in Boston, as chairman of the steering committee to oversee the nationwide event. The magazine's owner, Daniel Ford, secured the support of the United States Education Commissioner William Harris, as well as a Columbian Exposition official, helping ensure that there would be high levels of participation from public schools.<sup>6</sup> It was under Commissioner Harris that Native American children were forcibly removed from their homes to be "educated" in boarding schools, a trauma that still impacts Native communities today. His support for Columbus Day and the patriotic activities, such as the Pledge, that it entailed sheds light on the complex and entwined relationship between patriotism and colonialism, and the way in which patriotic sentiments can often be used to justify violent acts of imperialism.

Eventually, Bellamy would also get the support of President Benjamin Harrison (who said, "I did as much as anyone to promote the School Flag idea,"<sup>7</sup>) and convince Congress to proclaim Columbus Day a national holiday.<sup>8</sup> In addition to this public support, *The Youth's Companion* ran advertisements for the holiday, encouraging readers to buy flags and other merchandise for the event from the magazine.<sup>9</sup> Together, Ford and Bellamy came up with a ceremonial program for the school event, which was to be published in *The Youth's Companion*. It included a reading of the president's proclamation of the national holiday (which Bellamy had actually penned), a singing of "My Country 'tis of Thee", a prayer or scripture reading, and a few other readings of poems and speeches, commissioned by the *Companion*. Finally, the dramatic focus of the event would be the raising of the American flag in front of schools, accompanied by

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<sup>5</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 42.

<sup>6</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 44.

<sup>7</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 58.

<sup>8</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 67.

<sup>9</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 68.

the recitation of a flag salute by students.<sup>10</sup> Though a flag salute already existed at the time, written by Colonel George Balch for the first Flag Day celebration in 1885, Bellamy dismissed it as “juvenile” and penned his own instead.<sup>11</sup> It read:

I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation,  
indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

### Popularity and Federal Recognition

It is unknown exactly how many schools and schoolchildren participated in this nationwide event and recited the pledge as Bellamy had written it on that first Columbus Day celebration, but as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, the Pledge of Allegiance became a more formally recognized part of American culture. In the early 1900’s, many states made it mandatory to display American flags in front of schools. America’s entry into World War I in 1917 further boosted support for patriotic rituals and display. Flag sales increased 100 to 300 percent during this time as more individuals, institutions, and organizations began flying the American flag, and the Pledge became prominent in the Boy and Girl Scouts.<sup>12</sup> Federal and state laws banning desecration of the flag also increased, such as the Sedition Act of 1918 which made it illegal to, “willfully utter, print, write or publish any disloyal, profane scurrilous, or abusive language” about the government, the Constitution, the military, or the flag.<sup>13</sup> In 1919, the state of Washington passed a law that mandated that the Pledge be said in schools, which other states soon adopted as well.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 70.

<sup>11</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 71.

<sup>12</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 89.

<sup>13</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 90.

<sup>14</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 91.

Following World War I, an atmosphere of isolationism and xenophobia settled over America. Immigration quotas were curtailed and immigrants were viewed with suspicion. The Pledge continued to rise in popularity during this time, in part because it tapped into a larger desire to reaffirm American ideals as a way of easing anxieties about increasing immigration. *The Companion* even made clear in its pages that the goal of public schools should be to “assimilate these children to an American standard of life and ideas.”<sup>15</sup> Still, the Pledge of Allegiance was not yet officially recognized by the US government. A conference was called in 1924 by the American Legion’s National Americanism Commission to create a code for “how to honor and revere the American flag.”<sup>16</sup> The conference, held in Washington D.C., was attended by the members of private patriotic organizations, the military, and US government.<sup>17</sup> One of the by-products of this conference was a re-wording of the Pledge from “I pledge allegiance to my flag” to “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America”.<sup>18</sup> This change was made to ensure that children, especially those of immigrant parents, understood that they were pledging their allegiance to America, rather than the flag of their country of origin.<sup>19</sup> The commission also recommended that the Flag Code they came up with be passed into law.

The change in wording made during the conference reflected the desire for the Pledge to act as a tool of assimilation, ensuring the fealty of immigrants to the United States and its values. This change, along with the mandate that it be said in all public schools, can also be understood as an early indication that the Pledge has long been utilized as a tool of surveillance and discipline. In mandating its recitation and forcing immigrant students to pledge allegiance to the

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<sup>15</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 78.

<sup>16</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 92.

<sup>17</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 91.

<sup>18</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 92.

<sup>19</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 78.

United States government, nonparticipation is made extra-visible and even suspicious. If the Pledge's recitation signals a love of and loyalty to America, nonparticipation can be deemed threatening and untrustworthy. The hyper-visibility that the mandate creates encourages individuals, especially immigrants, to discipline their bodies into compliance with the norms of the ritual so as to remain inconspicuous and non-suspicious. As I will show, the Pledge continues to function in this way throughout history, and to this day.

In 1942, almost 20 years after the National Americanism Commission recommended that the Pledge and the Flag Code be codified into law, the US government passed a law recognizing Bellamy's Pledge of Allegiance as America's official flag salute. The law also outlined the proper etiquette to be followed during the recitation of the Pledge and other flag ceremonies, such as rules for the display, raising and lowering, folding, and saluting of the flag.<sup>20</sup>

#### West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette

The first significant legal challenge to the Pledge of Allegiance came in 1943, when Jehovah's Witnesses sued the West Virginia Board of Education because their children were expelled after refusing to say the Pledge in school. Jehovah's Witnesses are pacifists who do not believe it is right to pledge loyalty to anything but God, and therefore object to the Pledge of Allegiance. The case, *West Virginia Board of Education vs. Barnette*, went to the Supreme Court, where it was declared unconstitutional for students to be punished for not saying the Pledge of Allegiance in school. In the majority opinion, the court stated that, "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion, or force

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<sup>20</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 96-7.

citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.”<sup>21</sup> Further, they argued that, “To believe that patriotism will not flourish if patriotic ceremonies are voluntary and spontaneous, instead of a compulsory routine, is to make an unflattering estimate of the appeal of our institutions to free minds.”<sup>22</sup> This ruling’s legacy stands today, giving every student the right to refrain from saying the Pledge of Allegiance in school.

While this ruling is significant in that it made the Pledge a voluntary rather than mandatory exercise, it is important to recognize that its voluntary nature does not eliminate the possibility of pressure and even coercion to participate. In fact, the Pledge’s voluntary nature makes it difficult to distinguish sincere participation with compliance and superficial participation. I use the term superficial participation here to describe the act of performing the motions of the Pledge (reciting the words, embodying the appropriate actions) but doing so out of a perceived pressure to comply rather than a sincere desire to perform the ritual. Though the Pledge is not mandatory for teachers or students in public schools, it continues to be treated as a litmus test of loyalty by many, making nonparticipation, while legal, an indication of potentially suspicious beliefs or motives. In this way, the Pledge can function as a site of surveillance and discipline while remaining voluntary in nature.

## World War II

The West Virginia Board of Education vs. Barnette ruling came at a time when Americans were consciously trying to distance their own patriotic rituals from those of Nazi Germany. The salute that accompanied the Pledge had been changed just a year earlier, from an

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<sup>21</sup> West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette (June 14, 1943) (Cornell University Law School).

<sup>22</sup> West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette.



outstretched arm with the palm facing upwards to the hand over the heart that is common today, because many felt that the outstretched arm looked too similar to the Nazi salute.<sup>23iv</sup> The desire to distinguish American patriotism from fascism was also evident in the court's opinion, which warned that coerced unity has a history of violence:

Struggles to coerce uniformity of sentiment in support of some end thought essential to their time and country have been waged by many good, as well as by evil, men. Nationalism is a relatively recent phenomenon, but, at other times and places, the ends have been racial or territorial security, support of a dynasty or regime, and particular plans for saving souls. As first and moderate methods to attain unity have failed, those bent on its accomplishment must resort to an ever-increasing severity.<sup>24</sup>

Despite this rulings' admonition of coerced unity, Japanese American concentration camps in the United States during World War II were places where shows loyalty to the American government were both coerced and surveilled. In his piece, "Pledge of Allegiance: Performing Patriotism in the Japanese American Concentration Camps," Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson describes and analyzes everyday performances of patriotism in these camps, examining the way in which these displays of patriotism were often a performance of "national identification from the very space that negates one's position in the body politic".<sup>25</sup> The Pledge of Allegiance was performed in most classrooms in these camps, and Chambers-Letson argues that, "the performance of the Pledge of Allegiance is itself a means exhibiting the disciplinary nature of the camps as they are drawn into the incarcerated Nikkei [Japanese-American] body".<sup>26</sup> He describes a vignette he came across in a documentary about the Manzanar camp in which a teacher at the camp recounts saying the Pledge with her students every morning to an empty

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<sup>23</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 137.

<sup>24</sup> West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette, 1943.

<sup>25</sup> Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson, "Pledge of Allegiance: Performing Patriotism in the Japanese American Concentration Camps," In *A Race So Different: Performance and Law in Asian America*. (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 97.

<sup>26</sup> Chambers-Letson, "Pledge of Allegiance," 105.

corner, since they did not have a flag, until one day one of her students drew a flag for their classroom.<sup>27</sup> Chambers-Letson interprets this act- of pledging allegiance to an empty corner until an incarcerated Japanese-American student drew a flag to which they could pledge- as representative of the way in which Japanese-American patriotic loyalty was made suspect, enforced, and surveilled during this period. Through their incarceration, Japanese Americans were marked as suspicious and possibly disloyal. The performance of patriotism in these incarcerated circumstances was therefore a means for Japanese Americans to prove themselves to be ‘good Americans,’ but this show of loyalty worked to affirm the policies of the government that had incarcerated them unjustly. As Chambers-Letson points out, this vignette depicts the way in which the government attempted to “produce a population that would perform patriotism from the scene of its own negation.”<sup>28</sup> This story shows that despite attempts by the Supreme Court to disavow coerced forms of loyalty during the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to fears of appearing too similar to the Nazi regime, performances of patriotism were coerced and surveilled in other ways, especially on racialized bodies. Chambers-Letson writes that despite the Court’s seemingly progressive ruling in *West Virginia Board of Education vs. Barnette*, the ruling still revealed “the state’s anxiety about the production of national unity, national power, and national security through forms of patriotic performance.”<sup>29</sup> In this way, the Court upheld the idea that patriotic performances should instill national unity and inspire loyalty, but that the best way to achieve this goal was through voluntary rather than mandatory participation.

As World War II came to a close and the Cold War began, however, the Pledge of Allegiance became newly relevant in a very different way. Though *West Virginia v. Barnette*

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<sup>27</sup> Chambers-Letson, "Pledge of Allegiance," 106.

<sup>28</sup> Chambers-Letson, "Pledge of Allegiance," 111.

<sup>29</sup> Chambers-Letson, "Pledge of Allegiance," 110.

ensured that no student would be forced to say the Pledge of Allegiance, the atmosphere of the Cold War led to an important change in the words of the Pledge.

### Under God and the Cold War

Victory in World War II and America's postwar economic and political strength resulted in a surge of patriotism that boosted the Pledge's popularity once again. Critiques of its forced expression of unity quieted as politicians promoted it as a symbol of American democracy and freedom.<sup>30</sup> The Cold War, like World War II, prompted Americans to find ways of distinguishing themselves from the enemy. While Americans had rejected the compulsive and coerced nature of the Pledge in an effort to distance themselves from Nazi Germany, the Pledge gained importance during the Cold War, as a symbol of American democracy that could be contrasted with the repressive nature of the Soviet Union. During the early 1950's, as anticommunist sentiment and McCarthyism were on the rise, the catholic group The Knights of Columbus lobbied to have "under God" added to the pledge, as a way of distinguishing American values and ideals from 'godless communism'. The group mandated that the Pledge be recited with this addition in Knights of Columbus meetings and urged members of the government, including the President, to make the addition official.<sup>31</sup> In 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower approved the change, creating the pledge that is said today:

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all.

In his statement after signing the bill into law, President Eisenhower said,

From this day forward, the millions of our school children will daily proclaim in every city and town, every village and rural school house, the dedication of our nation and our

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<sup>30</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 142.

<sup>31</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 143-4.

people to the Almighty. To anyone who truly loves America, nothing could be more inspiring than to contemplate this rededication of our youth, on each school morning, to our country's true meaning...In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource, in peace or in war.<sup>32</sup>

Though politics and religion have always been enmeshed in American society, the addition of “under God” to the Pledge came at a time when the American people and government became even more accepting of public expressions of religious sentiment. In 1952, for instance, Congress approved an annual National Day of Prayer, the National Prayer Breakfast was introduced, and a prayer room was created in the Capitol building.<sup>33</sup> Since then however, the words have drawn criticism and stirred controversy. Being that the US constitution calls for the separation of church and state, a number of court cases have challenged the constitutionality of the “under God” line. Since the most significant of these cases have been decided after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, I will address these cases and their significance in the following section.

### September 11<sup>th</sup>, Patriotism, and the Pledge

The events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 renewed and reinvigorated the spectacle of American patriotism, making the Pledge newly significant in the American imaginary. The public school became a key site for the effort to reinstate patriotic rituals into American culture. In October of 2001, the Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, wrote a memo to the leaders of American public schools, which read, “Our flag is a symbol for all Americans that we are protected from violence

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<sup>32</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Statement by the President Upon Signing Bill To Include the Words "Under God" in the Pledge to the Flag," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9920>.

<sup>33</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 144-5.

and terrorism. It is important for teachers to display that freedom and patriotism by focusing on the flag.”<sup>34</sup> That same month, the New York City Board of Education unanimously passed a resolution mandating that the Pledge be said in every public school, every morning and at every school-wide function. In the next year, similar resolutions were passed in Tennessee, Illinois, Montana, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania.<sup>35</sup> News reportage from the days and weeks after 9/11 reveal a clear uptick in the importance of the Pledge, and other symbols of patriotism, in schools during that time. An article by Kevin Sack published in the *New York Times* two weeks after the attacks, for instance, notes that, “As a surge of patriotism has washed over the country in the wake of the terrorist attacks, nowhere has the revival been more omnipresent than in schools.” He goes on to report on homecoming dances with themes of “pride and patriotism,” assemblies with entire schools dressed in red, white, and blue, and lesson plans in history, art, and music changing to emphasize the importance of American values such as freedom and democracy. He also mentions that the Pledge had gained newfound importance in the weeks after 9/11. “Teachers and principals report that once slouching students now stand at rapt attention and virtually shout a pledge they used to mumble.” One student he interviews comments, “You can actually hear people say the pledge now.”<sup>36</sup> Of course, not all teachers, students, or schools experienced the weeks and months following 9/11 in the same way. It is important to remember the ways in which different communities experienced these events differently. Still, the atmosphere in many places after 9/11 did promote the kinds of loud displays of patriotism that are evident in this reporting.

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<sup>34</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 181.

<sup>35</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 179.

<sup>36</sup> Kevin Sack, *The New York Times*, “A NATION CHALLENGED: THE STUDENTS; School Colors Become Red, White and Blue.”

The increased importance placed on patriotic rituals such as the Pledge in schools after 9/11 was representative of the atmosphere across the country after the attacks. Gallup polls reveal that the percentage of Americans that considered themselves “extremely patriotic” jumped after the attacks, and continued to rise into the mid 2000s, peaking at 70% in 2003.<sup>37</sup> It was not until 2016 that this percentage fell below its pre-9/11 average.<sup>38</sup> President George W. Bush’s remark to congress just days after the attacks, “Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists,” suggest that the surge in patriotic displays after 9/11 was a show of support for the United States, but also a way of confirming American-ness and warding off suspicion of one’s loyalties. His comments reinforced a dichotomy of American and un-American that made patriotic shows a litmus test for “true” Americans, as opposed to un-American terrorist-sympathizers. This feeling, that anything but loud patriotism was possibly treasonous, is present in Michael Bérubé’s piece, *The Loyalties of American Studies*, which was published in June of 2004. In it, he states that,

“In the Bush lexicon, it would appear, the phrase “loyal opposition” is filed under “oxymorons,” as if the interests of the Bush-Cheney White House were coextensive with the parameters of patriotic political speech in the United States.”<sup>39</sup>

The surge of patriotism and patriotic rituals in the post-9/11 period brings into clearer focus the way in which the Pledge serves as a site of surveillance, especially in periods of crisis. During this period, the Pledge was mandated in schools, and the ritual was imbued with deep significance. Putting an American flag outside your house, sporting a ‘Support Our Troops’ bumper sticker, and saying the Pledge of Allegiance proudly were all ways to make clear to others that you were a ‘good American.’ The absence of these outward signals of patriotism

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<sup>37</sup> Jeffery Jones, “Sept. 11 Effects, Though Largely Faded, Persist,” Gallup, September 9, 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Jeffery Jones, “New Low of 52% “Extremely Proud” to Be Americans,” Gallup, July 1, 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Micheal Bérubé, “The Loyalties of American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 56 (2004): 223.

could therefore be viewed, in George W. Bush's terms, as being "with the terrorists." It is also important to recognize that people of color, Arab Americans, and Muslims often felt this pressure to perform patriotism more acutely, as their bodies were [and continue to be] viewed as inherently suspicious. Performing patriotism could be seen as one way that these populations were compelled to 'prove' their loyalty to the American nation. In this way, the hyper-patriotism of the post-9/11 era brought into clearer focus the way in which the Pledge functions as a site of surveillance and discipline in American society, and the ways in which certain populations experience this surveillance more acutely than others.

In the years following 9/11, a number of important court cases challenging the constitutionality of the words "under God" in the Pledge were brought before the Supreme Court and other lower level courts. The most notable of these is *Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow*, which started when Michael Newdow sued his daughter's school district in Sacramento County, California, because, as an atheist, he believed it was unconstitutional for his daughter's teacher to lead the students in a Pledge with the words "under God" in it.<sup>40</sup> The case was thrown out in the district-level court in 2002, because the judge said that, "the ceremonial reference to God in the pledge does not convey endorsement of particular religious beliefs."<sup>41</sup> When it was appealed to the Ninth-Circuit Federal Courts of Appeals, however, Newdow won. The majority opinion stated that,

When school teachers lead a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance according to school district policy, they present a message by the state endorsing not just religion generally, but a monotheistic religion organized "under God." While Newdow cannot expect the entire community surrounding his daughter to participate in...his choice of atheism...he

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<sup>40</sup> R. Murray Thomas, *God in the Classroom: religion and America's public schools* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 176.

<sup>41</sup> Jones and Meyer, *The Pledge*, 176.

can expect to be free from the government's endorsing a particular view of religion and unconstitutionally indoctrinating his impressionable young daughter on a daily basis in that official view.<sup>42</sup>

The Court's decision was widely condemned by public officials. The House and Senate voted nearly unanimously to reaffirm the words "under God" in the Pledge and President George W. Bush called the ruling "ridiculous."<sup>43</sup> The public denouncement of the ruling can be attributed, at least in part, to its proximity to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, which increased American sensitivity to any perceived attack on symbols of American patriotism. The Elk Grove Unified School District appealed the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, where it was ruled 8-0 that Newdow lacked standing to bring the case because he did not have decision-making custody of his daughter and was therefore unfit to bring a case on her behalf.<sup>44</sup> In this move, the Supreme Court was able to avoid making any judgment on the constitutionality of the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Most recently, a group of atheist parents in Massachusetts sued the Acton Boxborough Regional School District, saying that their children were discriminated against in school for their atheist beliefs by being forced to choose between saying a pledge they did not agree with or refrain and be scorned and marginalized by their peers. Further, the parents held that a pledge that states that America is a nation "under God" makes those that do not agree with that statement feel isolated, unpatriotic, and like second-class citizens. The case was decided by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, which ruled that the students were not being discriminated against since it could not be shown that they faced actual marginalization or bullying from peers, teachers, or administrators, and because recitation was voluntary so "one

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas, *God in the Classroom*, 177.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas, *God in the Classroom*, 177.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas, *God in the Classroom*, 180.



student's choice not to participate because of a religiously held belief is...indistinguishable from another's choice to abstain for a wholly different, more mundane, and constitutionally insignificant reason.”<sup>45</sup> There still has yet to be a successful challenge to the words “under God” in the Pledge. The ruling *Doe v. Acton Boxborough Regional School District* makes clear the way in which the Pledge’s voluntary nature can obscure the pressure that individuals feel to participate, and the effect that pressure has on emotions and actions. The ruling shows that courts have failed to take seriously the surveillance that is experienced during this ritual, and the way that surveillance influences bodies and minds, regardless of whether participation is technically voluntary.

The Pledge Protection Act, which was introduced to the House of Representatives in September of 2004, further reflected the post-9/11 American zeitgeist by attempting to ban constitutional challenges to the Pledge of Allegiance. If passed, it would forbid all federal courts, including the Supreme Court, from hearing cases related to controversies about the Pledge of Allegiance, such as the constitutionality of the phrase “under God”. The bill provides the following reasons for the necessity of this act:

- (1) The phrase “one Nation, under God,” in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag reflects that religious faith was central to the Founding Fathers and thus to the founding of the Nation.
- (2) The recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, including the phrase, “one Nation, under God,” is a patriotic act, not an act or statement of religious faith or belief.
- (3) The phrase “one Nation, under God” should remain in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and the practice of voluntarily reciting the pledge in public school classrooms should not only continue but should be encouraged by the policies of Congress, the various States, municipalities, and public school officials.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Doe v. Acton Boxborough Regional School District*, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Pledge Protection Act of 2004: report together with dissenting views, H.R. 2028, 108 Cong., U.S. G.P.O. (2004), 9.

The bill eventually died in the Senate and never became law, yet its significance is nonetheless enormous. The bill, and the fact that it was passed by the House, reveals a reflexive tendency during this period to protect and glorify American symbols, even at the risk of trampling other ‘American values,’<sup>v</sup> such as personal freedoms and checks and balances. The attempt to protect and sanctify the Pledge as an untouchable part of American life (untouchable by even the Supreme Court) also indicates the way in which challenges to the Pledge were (and still are) seen as suspicious and a signal of disloyalty, rather than a sign of a healthy democracy and a critical public.

Though its ubiquity often makes its recitation mundane, the Pledge of Allegiance has a history rife with tension and controversy: it has been the site of both expressions of unqualified patriotism as well as critical protest. As the key moments I have outlined show, the Pledge has historically functioned as a site of surveillance, making nonparticipation hyper-visible and potentially suspicious. This surveillance encourages compliance through the disciplining of bodies to fit the norms and expectations of the Pledge. By revealing the complicated and conflicting ways in which Americans have historically related to this ritual, these key moments provide a framing for my discussion of the complex relationship that Americans hold with the Pledge today.

### **III. Theoretical Framing**

Through an exploration of the personal, emotional, affective, and pedagogical relationships that teachers have to the Pledge of Allegiance, I have come to understand this collective ritual as a form of cultural surveillance and discipline that works to both enforce participation and make extra-visible non-participation. The structure and etiquette of this ritual, both on the personal and collective level, make it a key site for multiple vectors of surveillance.

In this section, I will outline the primary theoretical tools I will use to analyze the interview responses I have accrued during my research. I will begin by grounding my exploration of the Pledge of Allegiance as a site of surveillance and discipline in Michel Foucault's theory of discipline, showing how the Pledge in many ways functions according to his understanding of disciplinary power. I will then discuss how my ethnographic approach to this topic is inspired by my understanding of affect theory, and my belief that emotional and affective responses are rich and fruitful sources of analysis. I will also define my use of terms related to affect theory, as they are still in flux in this evolving field. Next, I will frame my analysis of the Pledge of Allegiance using ritual and performance theory to explore what insights can be gained from looking at this practice as a performative ritual. I will also discuss theories of embodied cognition, and their application to ritual practices. Together, these theories work to inform and ground my analysis of the interviews I have conducted.

#### Theories of Surveillance and Discipline

As I will argue, I believe that the Pledge functions as a site of surveillance and discipline in American culture, especially in American classrooms. The disciplinary nature of this ritual

works to encourage and venerate uncritical shows of patriotism and ultimately to serve those in power and uphold the status quo. My understanding of surveillance and discipline is heavily influenced by Michel Foucault's theories of control in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault theorizes that, "discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies" through "a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour."<sup>47</sup> Discipline works to control bodies "not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines."<sup>48</sup> In this way, discipline can affect not only behavior but also attitudes and modes of being.

In this model, surveillance is a key component in the effective use of disciplinary power. While traditional power (such as violence) gains strength from its extreme visibility, and the compared invisibility of its subjects, disciplinary power "is exercised through its invisibility."<sup>49</sup> Though disciplinary power is invisible, it imposes hyper-visibility on its subjects, and "it is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjugation."<sup>50</sup> Foucault posits that, "The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible."<sup>51</sup> It is therefore through surveillance and the hyper-visibility of the subject that disciplinary power is achieved. Together, surveillance and discipline work to enforce behavior that is advantageous to those in power without resorting to violence or overt power techniques.

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<sup>47</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Translated by Alan Sheridan. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 138.

<sup>48</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 138.

<sup>49</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 187.

<sup>50</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 187.

<sup>51</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 170-171.

As Foucault notes, the school has long been a site of disciplinary power.<sup>52</sup> In “The Docile Body in School Space,” Lizbet Simmons connects Foucault’s theories of surveillance and discipline to the school setting. She begins by noting that, “disciplinary power relations are embedded in the very foundation of the American public school system”, not only in new high-tech surveillance equipment, but also in “everyday expressions of control and governance- the practices embedded in typical school architecture and routine curricular arrangements.”<sup>53</sup> Just as Foucault describes, this disciplinary power in schools is made possible and enforced through surveillance. Simmons describes the many forms this surveillance takes in schools: “Schools rely on established disciplinary networks made up not only of security guards but also of teachers, administrators, students, and parents, who pay rigorous attention to the meticulous details of students’ bodies and students’ behaviors using the mechanisms of high-tech surveillance or the gaze of embodied observation.”<sup>54</sup> In this way, public schools are able to use multiple forms of surveillance to enforce disciplinary power on students, creating docile and disciplined student bodies that function according to the needs of the school and the state.

Building off of Foucault’s theory of disciplinary power and surveillance, and Simmons’ application of it to the public school, I argue that the Pledge of Allegiance is an important site in which disciplinary power and surveillance are encountered in school, by teachers and students alike. In order to explain how this takes place, I must first lay out the setting in which this ritual is performed in schools.<sup>vi</sup>

In all of the schools I have attended, as well as the schools that the teachers I interviewed worked at, the Pledge of Allegiance is read over the P.A. system each morning, by a student or

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<sup>52</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 138.

<sup>53</sup> Lizbet Simmons, “The Docile Body in School Space,” in *Schools Under Surveillance*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 55.

<sup>54</sup> Simmons, “The Docile Body in School Space,” 57.

an administrator. (In some schools, the Pledge is done individually in each classroom, led by the teacher or a student, but that was not the case in any of the schools I visited.) When the Pledge comes on, there is a general expectation that students and teachers will stand up, face the flag in the classroom, put their hand over their heart, and recite the Pledge. Of course, there are varying degrees of participation in this expectation, and the teacher's behavior during the Pledge can indicate to students what is expected of them, meaning students may act differently in different classrooms during the Pledge depending on what the teacher is doing.

The layout of the typical classroom, the specific embodied nature of the Pledge, and the authority structure in place in schools, work together to enable surveillance and discipline to occur during the enactment of this ritual. School classrooms are typically laid out to maximize the visibility of each student. Each student is assigned a desk, and desks are ordered regularly so that, from the front of the classroom, each student can be seen and accounted for. The teacher's desk, usually at the front of the room, can typically be seen by every student as well. This means that while the Pledge of Allegiance is being said, all students can, in theory, be monitored by the teacher, as well as by other students. In turn, the teacher is also visible to the students during this ritual. In this way, the architecture of the classroom space makes visible those inside of it and enables constant mutual surveillance to take place.

The embodied nature of the Pledge, and the actions it calls for, also facilitate surveillance by increasing the visibility of nonparticipation. The Pledge calls for very specific bodily movements and gestures, and one's actions can be labeled as deviant or suspicious through something as subtle as keeping one's hands at one's sides, or by casting one's eyes down rather than up. The very precise gestures and embodiments required during the Pledge allow judgment and discipline to be "normalized," so that the smallest of infractions can be labeled as deviant

and punished.<sup>55</sup> As Foucault notes, under disciplinary power, the punishment of these micro-infractions need not be grand: “By the word punishment, one must understand that everything is capable of making children feel the offence they have committed.... A certain coldness, a certain indifference, a question, a humiliation.”<sup>56</sup> In this way, the nature of embodiment required by the Pledge of Allegiance allows not only for deviant or non-participation to be hyper-visible, but also for the smallest of infractions (eyes cast downward, lips not moving) to be disciplined. In fact, “the whole indefinite domain of the non-conforming is punishable.”<sup>57</sup> In this disciplining, students’ bodies become “docile” as their movement and functioning is controlled so as to best meet the needs of those in power (the teacher, the school administration, the state).

Within the school, there are multiple hierarchies of power to which students and teachers are subject. In the classroom, students are subject to the rule of both the teacher and the state. While the state has the power to make rules over when and how the Pledge of Allegiance is presented to students, the teacher also has power, to some degree, to shape those rules to fit his or her own beliefs. The docility of the student body (during the Pledge of Allegiance specifically) serves the needs of both the teacher and the state. When students are trained to say the Pledge exactly as it is expected of them, teachers do not have to take the time to discipline them. The correct enactment of the Pledge also benefits the state in that it reinforces in young people the importance of unquestioning loyalty and obedience to the rule of the state. In the classroom, teachers are also subject to surveillance and discipline. The teacher is accountable to the school administration and the students themselves, who have the ability to talk to their parents or the administration if they see the teacher’s actions as out of line. The teacher is also

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<sup>55</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 177.

<sup>56</sup> La Salle, *Conduite*, 204-5, quoted in Foucault, 178.

<sup>57</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 178-9.

accountable to the state, which regulates and imposes rules on public schools, and by extension, the teacher. The docility of the teacher's body in the classroom during the Pledge (manifested in willingness to say it in front of students, regardless of their own beliefs) also serves the needs of the state, as it provides for students an example of what a 'good citizen' (a docile and obedient citizen) looks like. Both the teacher and the student have ideas about what 'should' be done in the classroom, and that 'should' is influenced by their understanding of what constitutes an appropriate and acceptable relationship between the citizen and the state. In many ways, the surveillance that the teacher and the student enact on each other utilizes this 'appropriate relationship' as a benchmark by which the other is evaluated during the performance of the Pledge of Allegiance.

In this way, the physical classroom, the nature of the Pledge, and the authority systems in place in schools work together to make mutual surveillance possible and almost inevitable during the Pledge. The public school classroom is a place of mutual surveillance, in which the teacher is surveilled by the administration and the students, and the students are surveilled by the teacher and, to a lesser extent, the administration. Both the teacher and the student are also surveilled by the state while in the classroom, even if on a more abstract level.

It is also important to be aware of those subjects who are, for various reasons, hyper-visible in the presence of patriotic rituals, and therefore experience the feeling of surveillance more acutely. For instance, in the United States, people of color are often made to prove their loyalty and 'American-ness' to an extent that white people are not, and criticism (real or perceived) of the American nation-state is often received with more hostility and suspicion when it comes from Americans of color than from white Americans. In this way, certain populations



may feel more visible and vulnerable, and may experience surveillance and the pressure of compliance more acutely, in the presence of patriotic rituals like the Pledge of Allegiance.

This constant mutual surveillance and visibility enables the disciplining of both student and teacher bodies in the classroom so that both groups feel compelled, or at least strongly encouraged, to participate in the Pledge ‘correctly.’ Ultimately, the disciplining of student and teacher bodies, and the ‘correct’ recitation of the Pledge every day by both groups, serves the needs of the state more so than any other authority. Surveillance and discipline during this ritual encourages unquestioning compliance, not only with the embodiment of the ritual but with the message it carries: that uncritical loyalty to the state is a virtue, and that allegiance is expected regardless of whether one agrees with the state’s actions and edicts.

I have outlined the theoretical grounding of my central argument, that the Pledge of Allegiance functions as a site of surveillance and discipline in schools, and in American culture more broadly. I have come to this conclusion through interviews with teachers, who think about and make choices regarding the Pledge every day, and who act as the primary role models for students in schools thinking about the Pledge of Allegiance and their relationship to the American nation-state. My choice to investigate this topic through interviews is grounded in my desire to understand the Pledge as a lived experience, and my understanding of affect theory, which centers the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and sensorial experiences of individuals in understanding cultural phenomenon and events. In this next section, I will elaborate on how my approach to this topic and my analysis of the data I have collected is rooted in theories of affect.

## Affect Theory and the Ethnographic Approach

The decision to explore the role and function of the Pledge of Allegiance in American culture and society through a relatively small number of interviews is based on my belief that personal experience, feeling, emotion, and affect are all integral to an understanding of cultural phenomena and events. This belief is founded in my understanding of affect theory. As it stands, there are two central strands of thinking in the definition of the term affect. The first posits affect as “situated in a continuum...or interchangeable with emotion” and feeling.<sup>58</sup> Scholars such as Raymond Williams, known for his theory of a “structure of feeling,” have theorized affect in this way. As an alternative, the Deleuzian strand views affect as a pre-conscious and “noncognitive process,”<sup>59</sup> a “physiological and biological phenomenon”<sup>60</sup> that exists outside of consciously felt emotion and deals with the forces, sensations, embodiments, and movements that “cause bodies and objects to affect and be affected by one another.”<sup>61</sup>

Though I utilize and discuss theorists of the first strand of affect theory, who speak of affect and emotion as interchangeable or on a continuum, my own analysis leans toward the language of the Deleuzian strand. I will refer to consciously felt and understood feelings as ‘emotion’ and will define ‘affect’ as the pre-reflective, sensorial, physical, emotive, and embodied forces that influence human thoughts, feelings, behavior, and (pre)dispositions. In making this distinction, I aim to make clear the difference between conscious and pre-conscious beliefs and actions, rather than affirm a particular strand of affect theory over another, as I see both as useful tools of analysis. Both emotion and affect are central to my analysis of the Pledge

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<sup>58</sup> Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: homonationalism in queer times*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 207.

<sup>59</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, “Affect,” In *Keywords in American Cultural Studies*, 2nd ed (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 15.

<sup>60</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 207.

<sup>61</sup> Cvetkovich, “Affect,” 15.

and its place in American society. Through my interviews, I aim to understand the role of emotion and feeling in this ritual, as consciously felt and described by my respondents. In talking to them about their physical movements and stature during the Pledge, I also explore the role of embodiment and physicality, which, while consciously understood by respondents, also reflects pre-conscious, or as I will describe them, “pre-reflective,” thoughts, beliefs, and tendencies. By “pre-reflective,” I mean that these thoughts and behaviors occur somewhere between the conscious and the un-conscious; they are done without serious reflection, and could go unnoticed by the subject, but are not mechanical or involuntary. Like theorists on both sides of the divide, my analysis is grounded in the belief that feelings, sensory experiences, and physical embodiments, both conscious and pre-reflective, influence the personal, social, and political lives of humans in important ways.

My analysis assumes that pre-reflective affects and conscious emotions mutually influence each other. A conscious feeling can subtly influence behavior and affects in ways that are not immediately recognizable to the subject. Furthermore, the subtle and virtually imperceptible affects of others can, without conscious intention, influence the emotions of those around them in ways that are noticeable. For instance, an individual can pick up on the affective cues and movements of those around them during the Pledge of Allegiance and this can influence the individual’s emotional state. The feeling of being extremely visible in a space where everyone is performing the same actions at the same time can make some individuals feel included and part of the group, while it can make others feel anxious about performing the ritual ‘correctly’ or being perceived in a certain way by others. In both these cases individuals are responding emotionally to affective cues in the bodies around them. One’s emotional state can also influence one’s own affect, which can be picked up on by others. For instance, some

teachers feel very strongly about the Pledge, and relay that feeling in their actions in front of students (by performing the ritual without fail every day, by standing at attention, by watching students during the Pledge, etc.). Students can pick on their teachers movements and actions, even the look in their eyes, and respond with certain actions and movements (standing up, saying the words) that they might not have performed had their teacher looked more relaxed during the ritual. In this way, affect and emotion work together to influence the thoughts and behaviors of individuals in the presence of collective rituals like the Pledge of Allegiance.

My analysis also assumes that, as Megan Watkins puts it, affect can “accumulate” through a repetition of exposure or experience, resulting in “dispositions that predisposes one to act and react in particular ways.”<sup>62</sup> As Watkins posits, the accumulation of affect can, “aid... cognition and induc[e] behavior” while “evad[ing] consciousness altogether.”<sup>63</sup> In this way, corporeal memories and experiences and the consciously felt accompanying emotions can, over time, accumulate and influence tendencies, attitudes, and predispositions in a pre-reflective manner. In the case of the Pledge of Allegiance, past affective and emotional responses to this ritual can subtly influence individuals’ behavior and attitudes around it. As I will argue, young children especially tend to have affective and emotional experiences and responses to the Pledge that encourage and reward ‘correct’ and ‘appropriate’ participation. These experiences and responses can accumulate and result in a predisposition towards this kind of ‘correct’ participation. This accumulation can evade consciousness, so that individuals may express these attitudes and tendencies without understanding their origin in a totally conscious or reflective way.

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<sup>62</sup> Megan Watkins, "Desiring Recognition, Accumulating Affect," In *The Affect Theory Reader* (Duke University Press: 2010), 278.

<sup>63</sup> Watkins, "Desiring Recognition, Accumulating Affect," 279.

## Ritual Theory

My analysis rests on the presupposition that the Pledge of Allegiance is a collective, performative ritual. My particular understanding of this practice as ritual relies most heavily on the work of Nick Crossley in his essay “Ritual, body technique, and (inter)subjectivity,” in which he attempts to “engage with... [the] corporeality” of rituals.<sup>64</sup> In this work, Crossley posits that rituals are a kind of “body technique,” a term coined by Marcel Mauss, meaning that they are “culturally specific ‘uses’ of the body” that reveal a kind of practical “know-how.”<sup>65</sup> Mauss uses the term “body technique” to refer to any kind of culturally specific embodied act, such as cooking, playing, or even walking. Crossley argues that rituals can also be thought of as a “body technique,” an embodied act in which agents can reveal practical knowledge and understanding about their social world. Furthermore, he posits that rituals can work to reaffirm and reproduce aspects of that social world in their embodiment and their ‘doing.’ Crossley also discusses the way that rituals (as body techniques) can be embodied and practiced through habit, without conscious thought or reflection: “We draw upon body techniques, knowing to use them in particular situations, without first thinking about or planning to do so, and we perform them in a similarly pre-reflective manner.”<sup>66</sup>

Conceptualizing of rituals as a kind of habitual body technique reveals the importance of understanding not only the emotional but the affective responses to ritual, and brings to light the ways in which the physical practice of ritual can become a pre-reflective process- one that can be performed without much thought. Crossley maintains that the response to a ritual’s initiation, or “call to order,” is neither “mechanical submission” nor “conscious consent,” but rather

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<sup>64</sup> Nick Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique, and (inter)subjectivity," In *Thinking Through Rituals* (Routledge: 2004), 31.

<sup>65</sup> Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique, and (inter)subjectivity," 33.

<sup>66</sup> Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique, and (inter)subjectivity," 37.

something in between.<sup>67</sup> An individual's response to a ritual's call to order is not entirely reflexive, like a doctor's tap on the knee, but also cannot be understood as entirely within the individual's realm of agency. This 'inbetween-ness' can be understood as containing both affective and emotional elements. In responding to a ritual's call to order, individuals draw on affective and emotional information about themselves and those around them, and this happens at the conscious and pre-reflective level. This holds especially true for collective rituals like the Pledge of Allegiance, where pressure to participate, whether understood consciously or not, exists due to the reality of mass participation and the visibility of non-participation. While possessing some agency and conscious decision making in this situation, individuals can be affectively influenced by the body movements and looks of others (their affect) as well as the layout of the physical space. This affective influence can be pre-reflective and not entirely conscious, and can influence one's decision to participate in a ritual in ways that not immediately understood by the agent themselves. Crossley utilizes the example of the national anthem in his analysis to explain this point, saying,

To initiate a ritual is to make a powerful normative appeal to very deeply rooted cultural dispositions. Others within the ritual community 'ought' to respond and will experience the social pressure of this 'ought' acutely. To remain seated during a national anthem, to give one example of a call to order, requires considerable restraint. One's 'natural' inclination is to rise. It is second nature to respond to calls to order "appropriately."<sup>68</sup>

In the same way, individuals can feel influenced, affectively and emotionally, to respond 'appropriately,' to the initiation of the Pledge, and this influence can occur in a pre-reflective manner, without the subject being entirely aware of the reasons they may feel inclined to participate.

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<sup>67</sup> Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique, and (inter)subjectivity," 40.

<sup>68</sup> Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique, and (inter)subjectivity," 40.

I will argue that the embodied act of performing the Pledge of Allegiance in the ‘expected’ or ‘appropriate’ manner reveals a “know how” about fitting in and remaining inconspicuous and non-threatening in American society. The act of performing this ritual both reveals an agent’s understanding about their social world- that participation is expected and non-participation is unusual and conspicuous- and works to reproduce that social world. In performing the ritual ‘appropriately,’ non-participation continues to draw attention and be labeled as deviant.

### Embodied Cognition and Patriotic Ritual

The affective influences that rituals can hold over individuals puts into question the true agency of individuals in the face of these collective practices. Furthermore, research on embodied cognition and ritual points to ways in which the embodiment of a ritual can influence a subject’s feelings, emotions, and cognitive state. Niedenthal et al. discuss a number of studies on embodied cognition that point to a link between attitude and emotional states and physical embodiment. One relevant study found that subjects had more positive attitudes about a message if they heard it while nodding their head than while shaking it, and that they had more negative attitudes about it if they were shaking their head while they heard it. Similarly, another study found that when subjects assumed a bodily posture associated nonobviously with a certain emotional state, they were more likely to report feeling that emotion. For instance, when participants read comics with a pen held between their teeth (which forces the mouth into a smiling position) they were more likely to find the comics funny.<sup>69</sup> All these studies suggest that an individual’s physical posture and bodily movements can influence his or her psychological,

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<sup>69</sup> Paula Niedenthal, et al., "Embodiment in Attitudes, Social Perception, and Emotion," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 9 (2005): 184.

emotional, and cognitive state. Crossley relates this phenomenon directly to rituals, arguing that, “rituals may be used to induce specific subjective states, particularly emotional states.”<sup>70</sup> He talks about how in rituals such as funerals and meditation, a “ritual use is made of the body for the express purpose of tapping into bodily processes which, in turn, effect a transformation of the subjective state.”<sup>71</sup> In this way, the embodiment of an act can affect the emotional or cognitive state of an individual, such as a funeral ritual resulting in feelings of sorrow or solemnity, and a meditation ritual resulting in feelings of calmness.

In this view, the positioning of the body called for during the Pledge of Allegiance can be understood as a means of inducing a certain subjective and emotional state in the participants. In “Pledge of Allegiance: Performing Patriotism in the Japanese American Concentration Camps,” Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson discusses the specific posture required during the Pledge and the relationship to the nation-state that it makes manifest in the bodies of the participants.

In spite of the simplicity of the Pledge of Allegiance, it is more than just an oath: it is an embodied ritual structured by a uniform choreography. One stands at attention, body erect with the hand across the heart. The gesture of the right arm draws the body inward while the gaze is cast outward, toward the symbol of national unity. The posture invokes a militant strength and preparedness, while the inward-drawn hand renders the most vulnerable part of the body (the gut) exposed. The choreography of the pledge is an embodiment of the subject’s implicit trust for and surrender to the nation.<sup>72</sup>

Chambers-Letson’s analysis of the posture assumed during the Pledge and its embodied significance helps make clear the ways in which physical posturing can hold real and symbolic significance. To his analysis, I would add a few other significant features of the physical posture assumed during this ritual. First, the custom of removing one’s hat during the ritual, as well as

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<sup>70</sup> Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique, and (inter)subjectivity," 43.

<sup>71</sup> Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique, and (inter)subjectivity," 43.

<sup>72</sup> Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson, "Pledge of Allegiance: Performing Patriotism in the Japanese American Concentration Camps," in *A Race So Different: Performance and Law in Asian America* (NYU Press, 2013), 110.



the fact that the flag being saluted is usually situated above eye-level and therefore requires being looked up to, both signal deference and respect. Secondly, the gesture of placing one's hand over one's heart signals that one's feelings are heartfelt and sincere. Finally, participants align their bodies physically with the flag during the ritual. If the flag is located in a corner, all bodies will shift to be physically aligned with the flag. This physical re-alignment in one's body can be viewed as a symbolic re-alignment with the values of the country and flag to which one is pledging.

The theory of embodied cognition, and Crossley's application of this theory to the realm of ritual, suggests that the postures assumed during the Pledge are not only symbolically important, but they may actually influence participants' cognitive and emotional states. For instance, if this theory holds, it suggests that the symbolic deference shown by removing one's hat and looking up towards the flag actually makes one *feel* deferential towards the flag, and more generally, towards the country and the government. Placing a hand over one's heart would actually make one's words *feel* more heartfelt, and aligning one's body with the flag might actually cause a participant to feel more ideologically aligned with the nation.

These feelings, of deference, sincerity, and alignment with the nation, are difficult to account for, and it is hard to make definitive claims about how and why these feelings arise in individuals. In fact, many of the people I interviewed said the Pledge five days a week and did not report any of these feelings of deference or sincere emotion. However, the potential for the postures assumed during the Pledge to hold influence over one's emotional and cognitive state is important to recognize. This potential makes the simple act of participating in this ritual- standing, putting a hand over the heart, and reciting the words- significant, even if ostensibly, the ritual is meaningless to the participant. This is particularly important to think about in regards to

students, who, at least in the public schools, are generally expected to stand and say the Pledge every day. While the words and actions can become rote and meaningless, the theory of embodied cognition suggests that the simple act of complying with the ritual can influence the thoughts and feelings of participants in ways that make them more likely to feel deferential and ideologically aligned with the state. In this way, the disciplining of student (and teacher) bodies into compliance with the expectations of the Pledge ultimately serves the needs of the state by encouraging uncritical shows of patriotism and venerating absolute obedience and loyalty, thereby strengthening state power and dominance.

This section has outlined the primary theoretical tools I will use to argue that the Pledge of Allegiance is viewed, experienced, and utilized in American culture and classrooms as a site of surveillance and discipline. My use of the terms ‘surveillance’ and ‘discipline’ is rooted in Foucault’s definitions of these terms. I understand the Pledge as a site of disciplinary power that works to create “docile bodies” that comply with the Pledge’s expectations, and ultimately to encourage obedience and allegiance to the state. My argument is based on interviews with teachers, and takes into account their emotional and affective response and reactions to this ritual. It assumes that these affective and emotional responses can accumulate and pre-reflectively influence tendencies and predispositions towards this ritual. My argument frames these rituals according to Crossley’s understanding of ritual as a “body technique” that reveals a practical know-how about one’s social world. In this case, the ‘appropriate’ performance of the Pledge reveals an understanding of how to fit in and remain inconspicuous while under surveillance. Though Crossley suggests that rituals such as the Pledge can be performed out of habit and without much reflection, the theory of embodied cognition suggests that even this kind

of superficial participation can hold real consequence, affecting the attitudes and beliefs of those who participate. This possibility makes clear that the Pledge is more than just harmless tradition; it has the potential to influence the relationship between the citizen and the state. In the next section, I will discuss and analyze the interview responses I have accrued, using these theories as my framework for arguing that the Pledge functions in schools as a site of surveillance and discipline, which ultimately works to enforce obedience and promote uncritical loyalty to the state.

## **IV. Discussion of Responses**

### Introduction

My interviews with teachers were focused on understanding each individual's relationship to the Pledge of Allegiance. I asked questions about their early experiences with this ritual, as well as their current feelings about it, and the way they engage with it in the classroom as a teacher. I went into these interviews without a theory about what role the Pledge serves in American culture, hoping that the interviews would lead me towards a better understanding of the reality of its function in society today. The responses I got from teachers were personal and varied, with contradictions and nuances making each person's story unique. Despite wide differences in these teachers' beliefs and experiences, the common thread I found that ran through each story was an association of watching and being watched during the Pledge. Many, if not all, of my respondents spoke of this ritual in the terms of surveillance. Some felt this surveillance outright, and spoke consciously of the way the feeling of being watched influenced their behavior. Others used language that insinuated subtle feelings of watching, or being watched, during the Pledge, and hinted at the way in which this feeling influenced their emotions and actions. For most of these teachers, their visibility and that of their students enabled mutual surveillance to take place during the Pledge, and that surveillance worked emotionally and affectively to discipline their bodies, encouraging compliance with the ritual's required actions and embodiments.

I have identified three of the central instances in which the Pledge of Allegiance is experienced or treated as a site of surveillance, compliance, order, control, and discipline by the individuals I spoke with. First, the experiences of these individuals as children learning and performing this ritual point to an early understanding of it as a place in which their actions were

watched, judged, evaluated, and disciplined. Second, many of my respondents continue to feel the pressure of surveillance and discipline around these rituals in their classrooms as teachers, which affects their feelings and behaviors regarding the Pledge. Finally, many of these teachers treat the Pledge as a site of surveillance and discipline in their own classroom, using it as an opportunity to enforce certain postures or behaviors in their students and a tool to maintain compliance, order, and control.

In this section, I will outline the many ways in which the teachers I spoke to treat and experience the Pledge of Allegiance as a site of surveillance and discipline. I will analyze my respondents' words as well as their reported actions during this ritual, as the two together can help reveal symmetries and inconsistencies in the way this ritual is viewed, experienced, and enforced. Furthermore, in combining an analysis of spoken feelings and reported bodily actions, I can better account for the emotional and affective forces at work during the Pledge that contribute to the disciplining of teacher and student bodies.

Before I begin the discussion of responses, I must make clear that my findings are limited to the individuals I spoke to. My sample size was relatively small, and was limited to the educators that I was able to get in contact with, through various connections in the Greenwich and Poughkeepsie public schools, and who were willing to be interviewed and recorded. Due to this small size, my respondents are not a representative sample of the population, and their views cannot be assumed to be true of all educators or all Americans. The diversity of views within this small sample makes clear the wide range of beliefs and experiences within this topic.

However, in the spirit of ethnographic research, I do believe that trends and consistencies among a small number of people have the potential to speak to a larger phenomenon. My

research aims to find a “structure of feeling,” as Raymond Williams describes it, among the responses I received. My interviews seek out “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt”<sup>73</sup> about the Pledge of Allegiance. In collecting and analyzing these diverse experiences and stories, I hope to “defin[e] these elements as a 'structure': as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension.”<sup>74</sup> Williams holds that analyzing the emotional and affective worlds of individuals is important and fruitful work. He says that this work “defin[es] a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics.”<sup>75</sup> In sifting through and analyzing the emotions and experiences around the Pledge of a small number of individuals, I hope to do this kind of work. Though each individual’s feelings might be viewed as “private” and “idiosyncratic,” a “structure” can be found that runs through these personal experiences, one that contains legible features and holds important meaning. The structure I identify among the responses I have accrued is the experience of the Pledge of Allegiance as a site of surveillance and discipline. The individuals I spoke to view, experience, and enact this surveillance and discipline in different ways. Still, this common experience and understanding of this ritual as a place where mutual surveillance and discipline occurs ran through the interviews, and is the framing that I will use to analyze their responses.

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<sup>73</sup> Raymond Williams, "A Structure of Feeling," In *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.

<sup>74</sup> Williams, "A Structure of Feeling," 132.

<sup>75</sup> Williams, "A Structure of Feeling," 132.

### Early Experiences

Though I found a great deal of diversity in the experiences and beliefs of the people I interviewed, one question I asked in my interviews generated very similar answers in most respondents. When asked to describe their first experience or memory of the Pledge of Allegiance, most described anxiety over performing the ritual ‘correctly,’ fear of getting in trouble for doing it ‘wrong,’ and the sense that they were performing the words and actions because it was ‘what you did’ rather than because it was meaningful to them personally at the time. This was true even of individuals who later came to find great meaning in this ritual. This common experience reveals the degree to which even young children, as they are first introduced to this ritual, understand it as event in which they encounter power and authority, and they feel the surveillance of that authority acutely. It also reveals the way in which this feeling of being surveilled influences the emotional states and affects the behavior of children.

The most universal experience among my respondents was the memory of memorizing the words to the Pledge and reciting them by rote without understanding their meaning. Tara,<sup>vii</sup> a high school English teacher in Poughkeepsie, New York, remembers, “Saying it and having to say it, and feeling like I didn’t have any feelings about it.” She equates the experience to that of a young child praying without meaning it:

I mean I didn’t grow up in a very religious household so I wasn’t forced to say prayer... but I guess it would be like that same feeling, like it was part of what you do every day, but you don’t really mean it, you’re just saying it to say it. Cause I was, like, a ‘good kid’ but I was like ‘Why are we saying this?’<sup>76</sup>

Candice Lane, also a high school English teacher in Poughkeepsie, similarly recited the words without feeling. She says, “I didn’t feel one way or another, it was just a routine and ritual we did

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<sup>76</sup> Tara Carroll, personal interview, November 22, 2016.

every day, as part of our morning routine with the announcements and such. It never really was... a personal connection, ever. It was just a routine and ritual.”<sup>77</sup> Isabel Pearson, a paraprofessional in a middle school in Greenwich, Connecticut also remembers the Pledge simply as a part of the morning routine:

I remember them telling us what it meant, and telling us that it was like national pride, but I don’t think I ever felt that until I was older, I don’t think I ever understood. I just thought it was something that we did. They have the announcements, we all stood up, we all said the pledge, they said a little schpeel and then we all went on with our day.<sup>78</sup>

Deborah Wolfe, another high school English teacher in Poughkeepsie, remembers, “reciting it by rote when I was in elementary school and eventually figuring out that the words weren’t what I thought they were, and you know, not knowing what allegiance really meant.”<sup>79</sup> Moe Sasaki, a first grade teacher in Greenwich, similarly remembers coming to a realization after she had been saying the Pledge for a while that she did not know what all the words meant:

I remember at one point, I asked, “What is allegiance,”...’cause I just had no idea, and people trying to explain to me.... And that did make an impact, in the sense like, “Oh, this is why we’re saying this every day,” but...I’m embarrassed to say I don’t think that happened until like 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade, somewhere around there I asked. But until then it was just sort of the way I started the day and it didn’t really mean that much.<sup>80</sup>

Richard, a social studies teacher in Greenwich, Connecticut mentions that his five year-old daughter has been learning the Pledge in school recently. He says that,

She just started kindergarten so she’s experiencing the Pledge now. So she’s definitely curious about it, and kind of fascinated by it. There’s been times she’s come home and she’ll cite bits and pieces and quotes of the pledge. And she doesn’t know what it means, or really have any sense of the meaning, but she understands it as this ritual of her schooling experience.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Candice Lane, personal interview, December 5, 2016.

<sup>78</sup> Isabel Pearson, personal interview, October 28, 2016.

<sup>79</sup> Deborah Wolfe, personal interview, November 30, 2016

<sup>80</sup> Moe Sasaki, personal interview, January 11, 2017.

<sup>81</sup> Richard Rogers, personal interview, January 11, 2017.



Tara also connects her own experiences to those of her young daughter, and her willingness to learn the words without understanding their meaning. She says, “I think little kids get really into it, and that’s the spooky part about it... I have a three year old, and if I taught her those words, she would be pumped that she just knew the words.”<sup>82</sup>

Memories of the Pledge as words to be memorized, or as something that was just another part of the morning routine were very common among my respondents. These responses reveal the degree to which children are willing to participate in rituals and recite memorized words that hold no meaning for them. Young children can, as Nick Crossley puts it, respond “appropriately” to a rituals’ “call to order,” even without understanding the intended meaning or purpose behind the ritual.<sup>83</sup> Deborah Wolfe tells a story from her childhood that perfectly captures this contradiction. Though this anecdote (as well as the following one) is about the national anthem rather than the Pledge of Allegiance, I include them here because they speaks to the way in which children learn very early to respond appropriately a ritual’s call to order, even before they understand what the ritual means. Deborah remembers:

When I was three years old my sister was in a school band recital...I was in the audience with my parents, and when they started to play [the national anthem], apparently I shouted out to the whole auditorium, ‘Everybody up!’ And my mom took me out of the auditorium. But like, three years old, I knew what the ritual was, I knew that’s what we do when that music starts.<sup>84</sup>

Robert, a high school social studies teacher in Greenwich, describes a similar experience. He spoke of first encountering the national anthem at Yankees games with his family, and explains how he learned what to do when the Star Spangled Banner was played:

I don’t remember there ever being instruction... except to watch people around you... I watched enough people to know when the time came this is what I needed to do...And of

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<sup>82</sup> Tara Carroll, personal interview, November 22, 2016.

<sup>83</sup> Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique, and (inter)subjectivity," 40.

<sup>84</sup> Deborah Wolfe, personal interview, November 30, 2016.

course if we're taking the national anthem itself, the words are difficult for a kid to learn, so I'm sure, I know for myself, I faked it as a little kid.<sup>85</sup>

As all of these responses reveal, the ability to perform patriotic rituals like the Pledge of Allegiance correctly often comes before they are understood in full. This is important for many reasons. Young children's willingness, even eagerness, to perform these rituals as expected of them shows that at this age, children are often not performing the ritual for themselves, but for others. They understand that they are being observed, by teachers, peers, or whoever is around them, and this observation creates an audience for which the children must perform. In knowing how to respond appropriately to the call to order of patriotic rituals like the Pledge, even before their meaning is understood, children display a knowledge of the ritual as a site of surveillance, a place where they perform 'correct' and 'appropriate' behavior for others.

In recalling their early experiences with the Pledge of Allegiance, many respondents also recalled feelings of anxiety that accompanied this ritual, prompted by a fear of doing something wrong. This fear of doing something wrong further reveals the extent to which children view the Pledge as a site of surveillance and discipline, a place in which their behavior is watched and evaluated against a norm. Furthermore, these feelings of anxiety and fear, and the actions they prompt (trying to perform the ritual as 'correctly' as possible), help explain the emotional and affective influence that surveillance has, especially on children, and the way that surveillance enables discipline and control.

Diana, a middle school social studies teacher in Greenwich, remembers an acute feeling of nervousness about saying the Pledge correctly in school.

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<sup>85</sup> Robert Parker, personal interview, January 13, 2017.

I moved from Maine to Nebraska in the middle of kindergarten, and I went to see my new school in Nebraska. And I was like, nervous, and I was carrying books, and I remember it was like the morning and they were doing the Pledge, and I remember looking at my mom and being like, “What do I do with the books?! I can’t put my hand over my heart, like, am I going to get in trouble?” Like ninety percent of my memories have to do with like, “Am I going to get in trouble?”...Even though I’ve never been in trouble in my life, but I remember...I was like “What do I do with the books?” ‘Cause I knew like once you heard that Pledge, you like, had to stop what you’re doing, put your hand over your heart, and look at the flag.<sup>86</sup>

I interviewed Diana together with a colleague of hers, Kathryn, who responded with a similar story of her own.

I have a similar memory of like, doing something wrong. Like I remember in one class we were doing it like, where each person said one word [of the Pledge]...and for some reason I had ‘Pledge *of* allegiance’ in my head so it was like, ‘I...pledge’ and it was my turn and I remember saying “of” and then I was like “allegiance!” and I was all embarrassed about it. So it’s the same thing...I just got all nervous and flustered ‘cause I used to hate to speak out.<sup>87</sup>

Amanda, a high school social studies teacher in Greenwich, recalls feelings of extreme anxiety around the Pledge, due to a stutter that often prohibited her from reciting the words with the other students.

My first experience that I remember with the Pledge actually was in kindergarten, and I had such a severe, severe stutter I was not able to get words out. The Pledge used to make me so so nervous. I would usually start crying, and sometimes I would have to go home from kindergarten because I’d be so scared about speaking first thing in the morning.<sup>88</sup>

These examples demonstrate not only that young children are very aware of their being surveilled and watched during the Pledge, but also that this feeling of surveillance influences the way children feel and act, and disciplines them to perform the ritual ‘correctly.’ In these anecdotes, the children feel anxious and nervous because they know their teachers and peers are watching them, and they want to perform the ritual as expected of them. They understand the

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<sup>86</sup> Diana Green, personal interview, October 28, 2016.

<sup>87</sup> Kathryn Bates, personal interview, October 28, 2016.

<sup>88</sup> Amanda Macdonald, personal interview, January 17, 2017.

‘rules’ associated with this ritual and are eager to follow them correctly. This feeling of nervousness about doing the ritual ‘wrong’ (not putting their hand over their heart, being outed for not knowing the words, or not being able to pronounce the words correctly) induces the children to do their best to perform the ritual ‘correctly’.

When these children performed the ritual incorrectly, they felt shame and embarrassment (as evidenced in Amanda’s crying and having to leave school, and Katheryn’s embarrassment over saying the wrong word in front of her classmates). On the other hand, performing the ritual ‘correctly’ is often rewarded, both explicitly, with the approval of a teacher or parent, or implicitly, with a positive feeling that the ‘correct’ performance gives the child. Robert’s explanation of why he liked standing for the national anthem at baseball games as a child describes this kind of implicit reward.

I think when I was a kid I was like, “Oh, this is great, we’re all kind of on the same page,” you know, the degree of respect and tradition. I remember saying to myself, “Oh wow, this is cool.” Like that there was participation, and it was voluntary, and I felt part of something, because there was so many people...I was proud, I think, to be part of something.<sup>89</sup>

Robert describes a kind of implicit reward, the feeling of being “part of something” that participating in the national anthem gave him. Moe, the first grade teacher in Greenwich, used the same language of inclusion to explain why even students that often did not follow directions or participate in class activities enjoy saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

We have a great class, but one child in particular who has various disabilities, and he’s very, how do you say...he doesn’t like to cooperate. But this is the one thing you don’t have to remind him to do...He just gets up with everyone else. And that seems like a small thing, but it really isn’t because everything is a battle, you know. Sit at your chair is a battle. Come to the rug is a battle. But no matter where he is he will stop, he will look at a flag, he will say the Pledge. And I think it is, it’s that whole unifying thing, the whole school says it together, he’s part of the school community.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Robert Parker, personal interview, January 13, 2017.

<sup>90</sup> Moe Sasaki, personal interview, January 11, 2017.

Moe uses the same kind of language as Robert, concluding that this child participates in the Pledge, even though he will not participate in much else, because of the positive feeling of being “part of the school community” that the Pledge brings him. June, a high school English teacher in Greenwich, also remembers how saying the Pledge in school made her feel included and part of the group. She recalls one student in her class in elementary school who did not say the Pledge, because she was a Jehovah’s Witness, and the dynamics that created in the classroom.

I distinctly remember the separation of everyone participating in it and one person not participating in it...[It] was a reminder every day of how this one person was different from the rest of the crew... And I think that made an impact on her connection to other kids in the room, and their connection back to her, because it was a reminder every day of how we were sort of different. ...I don’t know if she felt isolated, I assume she probably did a little bit.<sup>91</sup>

June’s clear recollection of the other child’s exclusion from a practice that she and her classmates participated in indicates the feeling of inclusion that performing a collective ritual like the Pledge can provide, and the isolation and exclusion that children who do not participate may experience.

As these examples show, the feeling of being included and a part of a group is a positive one, especially for children. The feeling of being included in a group, and receiving affirmation for one’s ‘correct’ behavior, especially in front of a group, is positive and encourages the continuation of that behavior. In this way, young children’s knowledge of their own surveillance encourages them to perform ‘correctly’ in the face of the ritual’s call to order, and their ‘correct’ behavior is rewarded, both implicitly and explicitly. The rewarding of ‘correct’ behavior influences children to continue to perform the ritual correctly in the future, and causes positive associations with the act of performing the ritual ‘correctly.’ On the other hand, the memory of

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<sup>91</sup> June Higgins, personal interview, January 19, 2017.

shame and embarrassment associated with performing the ritual ‘incorrectly’ (as in the cases of Kathryn and Amanda) may influence children to work hard to perform the ritual ‘correctly’ in the future. This kind of reward and punishment for performing the Pledge correctly and incorrectly can be thought of as a form of discipline. The surveillance that children feel in the presence of the Pledge of Allegiance- from teachers, classmates, and others watching them- creates an environment of evaluation, and disciplines children in such a way that creates strong incentives for performing the Pledge correctly and strong disincentives for performing it incorrectly. Though this discipline might originally come from teachers or peers, these incentives and disincentives often become implicit rather than explicit, showing that the act of discipline can be transferred from an external force to an internal one.

This analysis aligns with Megan Watkin’s idea of the “accumulation” of affect. She says that,

Affect, as it is understood here, is not viewed as simply transient in quality. These states of being are not only momentary. Through the iteration of similar experiences, and therefore similar affects, they accumulate in the form of what could be considered dispositions that predispose one to act and react in particular ways.<sup>92</sup>

Viewing the experiences of my respondents through this lens, I argue that the small and fleeting emotions, feelings, and even pre-reflective affects that children experience in the presence of the Pledge (due to praise, positive feelings of inclusion, or feelings of shame and embarrassment), accumulate and result in dispositions and predispositions that influence their behavior and feelings around this ritual. In the next section of this chapter, I will follow a few of the teachers introduced here, exploring the ways in which their current attitudes toward the Pledge may be influenced by their experiences with it as children.

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<sup>92</sup> Watkins, “Desiring Recognition, Accumulating Affect,” 278.

Children's performance of the Pledge without complete comprehension can also be analyzed and understood through Crossley's idea of rituals as body techniques that reveal a practical know-how about one's social world. The 'correct' and 'appropriate' performance of the Pledge reveals a child's ability to act in a way that makes him or her feel accepted and part of the group, and makes others (peers, teachers) view the child as cooperative, well-behaved, and respectful. In performing this ritual 'correctly' and displaying this 'know-how,' the child shows that they understand the Pledge as a site of surveillance- a place in which their behavior is monitored and evaluated by others- and that their bodies have been disciplined to behave "appropriately" during this ritual. In this way, young students learn that a good student, and a good American, is one that is obedient and loyal, and does not question the authority of their teacher or of the state. Ultimately, this lesson works to uphold state power and create a docile public that is willing to pledge loyalty to a state that is not loyal to so many of its citizens.

### Surveillance of Teachers

For most of the teachers I spoke with, surveillance and discipline continue to be a part of their experience with the Pledge every day. Many of the teachers I spoke with continue to feel surveilled during this ritual, and this feeling of being watched and monitored continues to influence their actions in a disciplinary manner, just as it did when they were younger. As previously mentioned, the role of a teacher in the classroom is one that invites surveillance from many vantage points. Public school teachers are accountable to their students, their students' parents, the school administration, and the state government. Because of the way classrooms are physically set up, the behavior of teachers can be closely monitored by their students and the administration, and parents can find out about teacher behavior through their children. In this

way, public school teachers face almost constant surveillance in the classroom. In my conversations with teachers, it became clear that the Pledge is a key site of surveillance in the classroom, and that teachers feel pressure from that surveillance acutely.

I identify two ways in which these feelings of being surveilled manifest in teachers. Some teachers speak freely of feeling surveilled in their classroom, and can consciously account for the effect that feeling of surveillance has on their behavior. Other teachers did not express their feeling of being surveilled outright to me in the words they spoke, but their reported actions in the classroom and outside of it suggest that they do feel surveilled- even if this feeling is pre-reflective- and that this feeling of surveillance works affectively to influence and discipline their behavior.

Some teachers I spoke to report a conscious feeling of being watched in the classroom, and can recognize and describe the effect that feeling has on their behavior. For instance, Candice, the high school English teacher in Poughkeepsie who remembers saying the Pledge by rote every morning without it holding “personal connection” for her, continues to say the Pledge every day despite it still not holding meaning for her. She explains that,

We say the Pledge here every single day. I do say it, just as an example. It is part of my job. I mean it's not like in our contract. But I think if you're the teacher in the room you should be modeling it. The expectation is that the principal, who is my boss, is asking the students to rise and say the Pledge, so as an appropriate teacher I have to model that behavior in my classroom....[but] there's really no emotion, there's no affect for me, at this point.... I think it's just one of those expectations both as a teacher and as a human of the United States. Like I'm a citizen, and we're just supposed to do it because it's the morally right thing to do. But I don't really have any feeling towards it one way or the other...I think that if I didn't, especially here, it would look, I wouldn't want that floating around, like 'Ms. Lane doesn't say the Pledge.' Like that's not the type of teacher I am.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Candice Lane, personal interview, December 5, 2016.



During the Pledge of Allegiance, Candice feels pressure from a number of different sources of surveillance to perform the ritual ‘correctly.’ She understands that her students are watching her and viewing her actions as examples for their own, and therefore feels pressure to behave in front of them in a certain way. She also feels pressure from the state to say the Pledge, as a way of proving herself a “moral” American citizen. Finally, she experiences the effects of the surveillance of her peers, and fears the judgment of other teachers if she were not to do it. In combination, these three vectors of surveillance work to discipline Candice’s behavior, causing her to perform actions and recite words every morning that do not hold meaning for her.

For Diana, the middle school social studies teacher in Greenwich who got flustered when the Pledge came on in kindergarten and her hands were full of books, the feeling of being watched and judged still influences her decision to say the Pledge as a teacher. She explains that,

Now, in the mornings, I stand up, and sometimes my hand goes over my heart, but...it’s funny, like when I was five, it was like, if you didn’t do it you get in trouble. And now its like, I do it so I don’t get in trouble, ‘cause the kids are looking at me.<sup>94</sup>

When I ask her if she would say the Pledge in a different setting, one where she was not expected to be a role model for students, Diana says,

And don’t judge. I would do it, obviously, but mostly because I... it’s that fear of doing something wrong again...I don’t reflect on its meaning, it’s not meaningful to me... But I would [say it] just because I’m a rule-follower and a conformist, and it’s just what you do, and I would feel guilty if I didn’t do it, because it’s so ingrained in you.<sup>95</sup>

For Diana, the pressure she felt as a child to behave ‘correctly’ during the pledge, because she knew she was being watched by adults around her that could ‘get her in trouble,’ continues to this day. In her job as a teacher, she similarly fears the judgment of students, which influences her decision to stand and say the Pledge, even though it still does not hold meaning for her. In

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<sup>94</sup> Diana Green, personal interview, October 28, 2016.

<sup>95</sup> Diana Green, personal interview, October 28, 2016.

this way, Diana exhibits Watkin's notion of the accumulation of affect. The affective responses to the Pledge that Diana accumulated as a child, such as nervousness and anxiety around getting in trouble, have accumulated and continue to affect her response to the ritual today. Through the accumulation of Diana's affective and emotional response to the Pledge and its accompanying surveillance, Diana's behavior has been disciplined, resulting in her compliance with the norms of the Pledge as an adult, even though the ritual does not hold personal meaning for her.

Even among teachers for whom the Pledge holds personal significance, many feel as though the Pledge is expected of them even if it is not technically mandatory. For Tara, the high school English teacher in Poughkeepsie that spoke of the "spookiness" of children reciting the words without understanding them, the Pledge holds meaning for her sometimes, and sometimes it does not. She explains that at times,

I get really moved and I feel very powerful about that [the Pledge]....It's day by day, depending on where we're at in our units, in our lessons, or what's going on in current events. I remember I started my first year teaching when Barack Obama was elected president. It was a whole different vibe, especially in this district. And that [saying the Pledge] felt really positive every day... But sometimes it doesn't feel like that. You know, we do a big unit in our grade level on the prison system, and mass incarceration, and it feels kinda like weird [saying it].<sup>96</sup>

Though Tara has clearly thought through her own feelings about the Pledge and has her own views on when she feels good about saying it and when she does not, she also admits that she can be influenced by the actions and expectations of those around her.

It's not in our contract but... it's expected of you. Like if you're walking in the hallways, it's expected that you stand still, at least stand still and honor it, and listen to it. But I have worked with other teachers, who, they look at it as mandatory, so they say it, and I don't want to create a rift in our classroom, so I'll say it with them. Like in years past, that's been the case. Like I don't feel like saying it, but I felt obligated to, depending on who I'm teaching with.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Tara Carroll, personal interview, November 22, 2016.

<sup>97</sup> Tara Carroll, personal interview, November 22, 2016.

Tara, just like Diana and Candice, often says the Pledge as a way of appeasing the expectations of others- namely, her colleagues and co-teachers, who she feels expect her to say it. In these situations, she is saying the Pledge to make others feel comfortable, so as not to “create a rift in the classroom,” even though she may not “feel like saying it.” This is another example of the way in which surveillance and disciplinary power work in the classroom to encourage and enforce compliance with the Pledge.

The way these teachers speak about the Pledge of Allegiance makes clear that they feel the pressure of surveillance during this ritual and consciously understand the effect it has on their feelings and actions. Diana says that she pledges so she does not “get in trouble.” Tara explains that she often does not want to say it but does because she feels “obligated” to. Candice says it because she fears that not saying it will change the way other teachers view her. This response to the feeling of surveillance is conscious and emotional. In other teachers, the pressure of surveillance manifests itself in more pre-reflective and affective ways. This second group of teachers report that they say the Pledge in front of their students but would not say it in another situation in which their students were not present, though many could not articulate the cause of this distinction. I argue that this effect is another kind of response to the feeling of surveillance, a pre-reflective and affective rather than a conscious emotional one. This argument aligns with Crossley’s understanding of ritual. He speaks of rituals as a kind of habitual embodied act or “body technique” that can be performed without complete conscious thought or reflection: “We draw upon body techniques, knowing to use them in particular situations, without first thinking about or planning to do so, and we perform them in a similarly pre-reflective manner.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique, and (inter)subjectivity," 37.

Teachers who perform the ritual of the Pledge of Allegiance in front of their students but do not perform it in other situations, or perform it less consistently or enthusiastically in other situations, can be understood as affectively reacting to the surveillance they feel in the classroom. In essence, the affective power of surveillance in the classroom can pre-reflectively sway teachers to perform the ritual as “expected” in that location. Likewise, when these individuals are not in the presence of that classroom surveillance, that affective pressure is not present and they do not feel compelled to perform the ritual in the same way. For some of these teachers, their experiences with the Pledge as children also contributes to their actions as adults, through the kind of affective accumulation that Watkins discusses. This affective accumulation may influence their disposition and tendencies towards the Pledge, even in ways that they are not reflectively aware of. This reaction to the feeling of surveillance is affective and pre-reflective rather than conscious and emotional, yet it is nonetheless an example of disciplinary power.

June, the high school English teacher in Greenwich who spoke of the student in her elementary class who was a Jehovah’s Witness and did not recite the Pledge, only says the Pledge when she is in front of her students. She says, “If I’m not in a room with kids, I rarely stand when it’s being said. But when I’m in a room with kids, I’m standing, hand over heart...quiet. If I’m walking in the hallways and its being spoken I typically don’t stop.”<sup>99</sup> Though June does not talk consciously about feeling watched or surveilled in the classroom the way some other teachers do, her actions suggest that she acts differently in the classroom because she understands that it is a place where there are certain expectations of her, and she feels pressure to fulfill those expectations. June’s experience as a child with a fellow student that did not say the Pledge, and her feeling that, “[It] was a reminder every day of how this one

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<sup>99</sup> June Higgins, personal interview, January 19, 2017.

person was different from the rest of the crew,” could also affectively influence her predisposition to the Pledge today, encouraging her to say it, even though it does not hold meaning for her, as a way of affirming her part in the school community. June admits that, “As the adult in the room, I’m kind of perpetuating the possibility that it’s not all that important” by saying it without meaning it, but that has not changed her decision to only say it in the classroom.

When I ask Isabel, the paraprofessional at a middle school in Greenwich, if she would say the Pledge if she were not in front of students, she said, “No, I probably wouldn’t. No. I don’t think I’m like that patriotic to be honest.”<sup>100</sup> Robert, the high school social studies teacher in Greenwich who recalls liking the feeling of being ‘part of’ something when he stood for the national anthem at baseball games as a kid, always says the Pledge in front of his students but often does not say it when he is not in the classroom. When the Pledge comes on and he is in his office with only other teachers around, he says that,

Sometimes, I will stand, sometimes I won’t... I often will stand and I might not recite the Pledge but I’ll comply with standing, and I will be quiet during that, and then I’ll go back to what I’m doing. But there are many who don’t stand at all and just continue to work. And I’ve been guilty of that too.<sup>101</sup>

When I ask if he thinks that saying the Pledge is important when students are not around, he says, “I don’t.”<sup>102</sup> In this way, Robert’s decision to stand and say the Pledge in front of his students not only reflects the unique surveillance he feels in the classroom, but also is potentially influenced by the way the Pledge made him feel as a child. In saying the Pledge in front of students, who are also expected to say it, the feeling of being a “part of something” is reinforced. This feeling is less strong when he is alone or in his office with other teachers, who are less

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<sup>100</sup> Isabel Pearson, personal interview, October 28, 2016.

<sup>101</sup> Robert Parker, personal interview, January 13, 2017.

<sup>102</sup> Robert Parker, personal interview, January 13, 2017.

consistent in their behavior. Though these teachers do not talk explicitly about how the feeling of being watched alters their behavior, the actions they report suggest that they do feel surveilled in the classroom, and that surveillance works affectively to influence and discipline their behavior, even if that influence is somewhat pre-reflective.

These examples show that teachers experience the Pledge as a site of surveillance and discipline in their classrooms. In the classroom, teachers are visible to students, the administration, and to some degree, parents and the state. Some teachers consciously experience this visibility as surveillance, and report the change in behavior and emotion that that surveillance creates. Others experience and manifest the feeling of surveillance affectively. These individuals report acting differently when they are in the classroom in front of students and when they are not, suggesting that their bodies respond affectively to the surveillance in the classroom, by performing the ritual ‘correctly,’ even if they do not consciously identify that surveillance as the reason for a change in their behavior. Both conscious and pre-reflective responses to surveillance however can be understood as a manifestation of disciplinary power. In both cases, the surveillance present in the classroom disciplines the teachers’ behavior, encouraging compliance with the norms of the Pledge regardless of the teachers’ feelings about the ritual. These disciplined teacher bodies act as examples for students, teaching them that a model citizen is loyal and obedient to the state regardless of personal belief. Furthermore, in both these cases, the performance of the Pledge can be understood as revealing a kind of ‘know how’ in these individuals. In performing the ritual “appropriately,” they show that they know how to act in a way that does not threaten or offend people around them, and that allows them to remain ‘normal’ and inconspicuous in the eyes of those watching them.

While a number of the teachers I spoke with say the Pledge in front of their class but not in other situations where they are not being watched by students or others, this was not true of everyone. Cynthia, a first grade teacher in Greenwich, says that reciting the Pledge even when students are not around is one of the ways she expresses her patriotism. She says that during meetings with teachers, “if they start the Pledge [over the P.A. system], not only me but my teammates will stand up and say it, even though no one’s there.”<sup>103</sup> Andrew, a paraprofessional in Greenwich who served in the Marines, also recites the Pledge even if no one is around.<sup>104</sup> Allison, a social studies teacher in Greenwich, will also perform the Pledge when she is not around students. She says that when she is in her office and the Pledge comes on, “I normally stand and I put my hand on my heart and I say it in my mind, and I don’t necessarily say it out loud.”<sup>105</sup> For all the teachers that report saying the Pledge both in and out of the classroom, the ritual holds significant personal meaning for them. All consider themselves patriotic and see the Pledge as a way of expressing and reaffirming their patriotism. While these teachers do not necessarily say and perform the Pledge because they feel the pressure of others watching them, they do experience the Pledge as a site of surveillance and discipline in a different way. These teachers, along with others I interviewed, enact surveillance on their students in the classroom during this ritual by enforcing certain kinds of behavior during the Pledge, suggesting that multiple vectors of surveillance and discipline are present during the Pledge of Allegiance.

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<sup>103</sup> Cynthia Murphy, personal interview, January 13, 2017.

<sup>104</sup> Andrew Myers, personal interview, October 28, 2016.

<sup>105</sup> Allison Johnson, personal interview, January 19, 2017.

## Teachers as Surveillers

The final way in which the teachers I spoke with experience the Pledge as a site of disciplinary power is in their own surveilling and disciplining of students during this ritual. As teachers, all of my respondents are in a position of power in their classroom that affords them the ability to surveil and discipline their students. I identify three ways in which this surveillance is manifested and utilized by the teachers I spoke with. First, some teachers use the Pledge as a way of creating and maintaining order in their classroom, suggesting that the ritual is used as a means of group surveillance, a way to account for, discipline, and control a group of students. Secondly, some teachers use language of compliance versus defiance when talking about their students' behavior during the Pledge, indicating that they view the Pledge as another forum for surveilling and evaluating students' behavior. Finally, the most direct way that teachers enact surveillance on their students is in their enforcement of certain postures, behaviors, and attitudes during the Pledge, a clear example of the disciplining of student bodies.

Many of the teachers I spoke with utilize the Pledge in their classroom as a way of creating and maintaining order. Cynthia, the first grade teacher in Greenwich, invited me to come observe in her classroom during the morning routine, including the Pledge, before our interview. The students were working at their desks when the Pledge came on over the loudspeaker, led by an older student. The students responded immediately. They all stood up, faced their bodies towards the flag, put their hands over their hearts, and recited the words. Cynthia did the same. I initially just watched, but quickly realized I was the only one in the classroom not saying the words, so I joined in, though I felt conflicted about it. A "moment of silence" followed the Pledge. When this was over, Cynthia went back to her desk and the



students, unprompted, gathered on the carpet and a student led them in “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” one of the patriotic songs that she teaches the students. After the song, the students sat down on the carpet and Cynthia sat on a chair in front of them, as she led them in “mindfulness”. She directed the students to put their hands on their knees and they all sat quietly for a minute. She led them in deep breathing, and then they started their business of the day. The routine of doing the Pledge, the moment of silence, the patriotic song, and mindfulness was clearly ingrained in the students, and they seemed able to move through the routine without the teacher’s prompting or supervision. Cynthia said that she likes the routine because it “sets a nice tone” for the day.<sup>106</sup> It is something they do every morning and it functions as a way of centering and focusing the students. Routines are often used in classrooms to create an orderly and familiar atmosphere, but the use of the Pledge of Allegiance and a patriotic song in this way is interesting because it suggests that these activities are functioning as a way for the teacher to create order in her classroom. In this way, a student not participating could be viewed as an indication of disorderliness or disobedience.

Richard, the high school social studies teacher in Greenwich, also speaks of using the Pledge to maintain order. Though Richard makes the choice not to say the Pledge in his classroom, he does say it at school-wide assemblies. In these situations he says,

I always say it, and I think it’s more of a group management thing at that point. Whereas my interest is, I’m one of the teachers in this room, there are hundreds of kids, we’re trying to get everybody on the same page, and the Pledge is sort of a useful device for getting...whatever we’re doing in the assembly going. And so there, for the good of...whatever that assembly is about, there I will say it.<sup>107</sup>

Richard, like Cynthia, utilizes the Pledge as a tool to focus students and create order. This use of the Pledge suggests that the ritual is at times used as a way of organizing a group of students so

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<sup>106</sup> Cynthia Murphy, personal interview, January 13, 2017.

<sup>107</sup> Richard Rogers, personal interview, January 11, 2017.

as to better be able to monitor and control their behavior. This use of the Pledge equates non-participation or alternative participation with disorderliness. In this way, the Pledge can be understood as a form of group surveillance and a means of disciplining student bodies to create order.

Another way that the Pledge is utilized by teachers as a means of surveilling and evaluating their students is through the language some use to describe students who do and do not participate in the ritual ‘correctly.’ Many teachers I spoke with use language that suggests that they view the Pledge as just another arena in which students’ behavior can be monitored, evaluated, and judged against a norm, a place where students either ‘comply’ or act ‘defiantly.’ Beverly, the curriculum coordinator for a middle school in Poughkeepsie, describes her experience with students saying the Pledge in the schools she has worked at: “It seems like, if it’s the ritual, people will stop and pledge allegiance. And there’s never any ifs, ands, or buts. I never really see like, anyone being, you know, defiant.”<sup>108</sup> Robert, the high school social studies teacher in Greenwich, also speaks of the recitation of the Pledge using the complaint/defiant dichotomy. Describing his first period class, where they say the Pledge, he says, “It just happens to be that I have...my freshman that block, and maybe because they’re younger, they’re quicker to comply.”<sup>109</sup> Allison, another high school social studies teacher in Greenwich, says,

I think in the elementary years, students are very compliant... The high school years, the kids become savvy enough to know that we can’t legally compel you to say the Pledge and it’s also a big of an act of defiance, and teenage rebellion to not say the Pledge.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Beverly Phelps, personal interview, December 9, 2016.

<sup>109</sup> Robert Parker, personal interview, January 13, 2017.

<sup>110</sup> Allison Johnson, personal interview, January 19, 2017.

In using the language of compliance versus defiance when talking about students' behavior during the Pledge, these teachers suggest that the ritual is a site for monitoring student behavior and judging and disciplining it against a norm of 'good' or 'complaint' behavior. Many aspects of the school day can be understood as a way of evaluating which students 'behave' and which do not. The ability to sit still without fidgeting, walk quietly in a line in the hallway, and sit up straight at a desk are all ways that teachers evaluate complaint behavior in school. Many teachers speak of the Pledge in these same terms, suggesting that they view it as just another site for surveillance, evaluation, and discipline rather than an opportunity for personal reflection or meaning-making.

The final and most direct way that teachers enact surveillance and disciplinary power on their students during the Pledge is through the enforcement of certain postures, behaviors, and attitudes during the ritual. Students' visibility in the classroom, as well as teachers' position of authority, enables teachers to surveil and discipline student bodies in such a way that compliance with the Pledge is encouraged and sometimes even enforced. These teachers utilize the mechanisms of surveillance and discipline in different ways and to differing degrees, yet all enact disciplinary power on their students. As Foucault notes, "At the heart of all disciplinary systems is a small penal mechanism. It enjoys a kind of judicial privilege with its own laws, its specific offences, its particular forms of judgment."<sup>111</sup> Disciplinary systems, he says, "[partition] an area that the laws [have] left empty."<sup>112</sup> The teachers I highlight in this next section all use micro-punishments (a stern look, a comment) to regulate and discipline student behavior during the Pledge that would normally be considered appropriate, even in school (looking downward,

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<sup>111</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 177-8.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

hands at sides, silent). In this way, these teachers enact disciplinary power on their students, enforcing very precise movements and gestures during the Pledge without having to resort to harsher forms of punishment.

Andrew, the paraprofessional in a Greenwich middle school, is the strictest in his enforcement of what he sees as the proper and respectful behavior during the Pledge. Andrew is a Marines veteran, and finds great personal meaning in the Pledge. He says,

I gotta be honest, I *enjoy* saying it every morning...I enjoy when the kids see me say it...Like I *make* kids get up and say it. Especially some of my behavioral kids, I'm like "Dude...Stand up man, show some respect, some discipline. Put your hand over your heart, say the pledge." You know? I find it disrespectful when people choose not to.<sup>113</sup>

Cynthia, a first grade teacher in Greenwich, also finds it disrespectful when students do not take the Pledge seriously. While she will not force a child to say the Pledge, she says,

I get very offended if someone isn't being respectful. Leaning on the desk, or trying to finish up work. Just to tell them, "This is not the time for that. It's 30 seconds and you need to show respect." Always in a kind way, I don't want it to be a punishment ever, or for them to have that memory.... Just making sure that they're respectful, they say every word, they're at attention, they're facing the flag, if anyone ever has a hat, it's off, wrong hand, you teach them to use the right hand. So just staying on top of it so it doesn't get slovenly in any way.<sup>114</sup>

Cynthia's distinction between her method of enforcement ("Just making sure that they're respectful, they say every word, they're at attention, they're facing the flag") and "punishment" reflects Foucault's distinction between traditional and disciplinary power. While traditional power uses violence and overt punishment to enforce compliance, disciplinary power utilizes the power of surveillance along with subtle micro-punishments ("a certain coldness, a certain indifference, a question, a humiliation"<sup>115</sup>) to discipline bodies into compliance and obedience.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Andrew Myers, personal interview, October 28, 2016.

<sup>114</sup> Cynthia Murphy, personal interview, January 13, 2017.

<sup>115</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 178.

<sup>116</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 187.

Through surveillance and this kind of micro-punishment (which could take the form of stern looks or comments in Cynthia's case), Cynthia enacts disciplinary power on her students, enforcing what she sees as the 'correct' behavior during the Pledge.

Andrew and Cynthia fall on the more extreme end when it comes to their focus on surveilling and enforcing what they see as 'correct' behavior during the Pledge of Allegiance. Most teachers I spoke to indicated that they had some expectations of students to show a basic respect while the Pledge was said, but that they did not necessarily enforce recitation. The kind of "respect" that these teachers expect, however, requires very specific kinds of movements and gestures from students. Diana, the middle school social studies teacher in Greenwich, says, "I've had students from other countries that have refused to stand up and I just ask them to at least stand up, I never force them to say it. But they're other teachers that force them to say it. As long as they're not disrespectful [it's ok]." <sup>117</sup> Amanda McDonald, a high school social studies teacher in Greenwich, says that she "encourages" students to participate but does not "harp on" it. <sup>118</sup> Allison, the social studies teacher in a Greenwich high school, also expects students to be "respectful" during the Pledge, and has a specific understanding of what kind of behavior that entails. She says,

I've said [to students], "I will never force you to say the Pledge, but you should be respectful." And respect comes in many ways. You can be quiet and disrespectful... So like, yes you're being quiet, but you're goofing off, your checking your phone...to me it's more important that you show respect. And to me, respect is at least being quiet, and like, focused, or meditative. <sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Diana Green, personal interview, October 28, 2016.

<sup>118</sup> Amanda McDonald, personal interview, January 17, 2017.

<sup>119</sup> Allison Johnson, personal interview, January 19, 2017.

Allison's comment further illuminates Foucault's idea that, under disciplinary power, "the whole indefinite domain of the non-conforming is punishable."<sup>120</sup> As she sees it, even students that are quiet during the Pledge can be acting disrespectfully if they are not quiet in the right way. In this way, even actions that might be considered appropriate and respectful outside the realm of the Pledge or the school are considered deviant during this ritual, and are disciplined accordingly. In enforcing certain behaviors, postures, and attitudes during the Pledge, these teachers make clear that the ritual is a time during which students are watched, evaluated, and their bodies disciplined.

As these examples have shown, teachers often pass on the surveillance and discipline they experience in the classroom to their students. I have highlighted three ways in which teachers do this: by enforcing certain behaviors during the Pledge, by describing it as a routine that is either complied with or defied, and in their use of the Pledge as a method of monitoring and controlling a group of students. In this way, the teachers I spoke with all enact surveillance on their students and contribute to the disciplining of student bodies to comply with the expectations of the Pledge, ultimately teaching students that obedience to the state's mandates is more important than critical thought or personal reflection.

### A Better Way

Though the Pledge is experienced and treated by many teachers as a site of surveillance and discipline, a few teachers spoke of this ritual in a unique way, suggesting that it could be utilized as a site of discussion and critical thought in the classroom, rather than a tool of disciplinary power. For instance, Tara, the high school English teacher in Poughkeepsie, treats

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<sup>120</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 178-9.

the Pledge in her classroom, and her students' reaction to it, as a jumping-off point for important conversations. She explains that Colin Kaepernick's protest, in which the NFL player kneeled during the playing of the national anthem in protest of racial injustice and police brutality, "definitely layered a lot of our students' understanding of it [the Pledge] and desire to say it."<sup>121</sup>

She says that her students

oftentimes opt out of it, and I support them in doing that. I'm not gonna make anybody... Working with teenagers, we want to encourage them to have choice and voice, and this is sometimes the only way that they protest. It's like their first mini little protest. In junior high, it's even a bigger deal. They're just emerging into a political self. This is the first like, "I don't believe in this country because of x, y, and z," whether its unfounded or not, or they have good evidence for what it is. And I support them in whatever they do. But it's the first time they can revolt against that, like what's expected of them, knee-jerk patriotism.<sup>122</sup>

Tara views her students' choices during the Pledge as an indication of their critical thinking abilities, and uses their "mini protest" as a way of inspiring them to think critically about their country and what they can do to improve it. She explains that,

For me I look at it as an opportunity to inspire them. Like this is just one thing, this is a tiny thing, if you don't stand in my third period English class, you know, it's not gonna make or break, but what else can you do about that feeling outside of here?<sup>123</sup>

Rather than enforcing certain postures during the Pledge or using it as a time to evaluate her students' behavior, Tara sees her students' choices as valid and rooted in critical thought and political interest. She uses these choices as a way to encourage students to think critically about their relationship to the state and push them to make conscious decisions that reflect their views. She also uses the Pledge as a way of inspiring students to take up and work for causes they believe in.

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<sup>121</sup> Tara Carroll, personal interview, November 22, 2016.

<sup>122</sup> Tara Carroll, personal interview, November 22, 2016.

<sup>123</sup> Tara Carroll, personal interview, November 22, 2016.

Two other teachers I spoke with actively encourage their students to make thoughtful and conscious choices when it comes to the Pledge. Interestingly, these were the only two teachers who chose not to say the Pledge at all in front of their students. Richard, the high school social studies teacher in Greenwich, explains that he felt very conflicted about the Pledge when he first started teaching, but talked to colleagues and decided against saying it in class. He explains,

The decision I've come to with the Pledge is that I will stand and respect it, but I don't say it. Partly because I don't want to be told to say it on a daily basis. And partly because I would like the students to come to their own decision about whether or not they want to say it.<sup>124</sup>

Deborah, the high school English teacher in Poughkeepsie, does not say the Pledge because she objects to the "under God" phrase in it. She explains,

I haven't said it in years. I'll stand, I'll salute the flag, I'll insist on silence in the classroom. But I don't make my students stand. I ask them to, but I don't insist they do, and I don't insist that they recite it, although I do invite them to if they wish to. I make it a point that if they want to, they shouldn't take my silence as a cue. I have my reasons for why I don't say it, but they can say it or not as they choose.<sup>125</sup>

Like Tara and Richard, Deborah also views her acceptance of her students' choices about the Pledge as a way of encouraging critical thinking. She says,

I have had a few students ask me why, and I don't want to politicize my views to them.... But I do point out that I don't say it, that doesn't mean you can't say it, you're absolutely free to. I have reasons why I don't say it, but I'm not going to go into those. But I think it does, it does make them think, is this optional? And why am I doing it, and what does it mean?<sup>126</sup>

Tara, Richard, and Deborah offer an alternative way of thinking about the role of the Pledge in the classroom. These teachers see choices about the Pledge- made both by teachers and students- as reflections of critical thought and questioning. They are open to students who choose to perform the ritual differently than they do, and invite students to look at the Pledge as a means of

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<sup>124</sup> Richard Rogers, personal interview, January 11, 2017.

<sup>125</sup> Deborah Wolfe, personal interview, November 30, 2016.

<sup>126</sup> Deborah Wolfe, personal interview, November 30, 2016.



representing and manifesting their thoughts and beliefs about their country and their relationship to it. In showing acceptance of their students' choices during the Pledge and using these choices as a conversation starter, these teachers frame the Pledge as a site of critical thinking and discussion rather than a site of surveillance, discipline, and control.

Furthermore, the way these teachers approach the Pledge of Allegiance in their classrooms reflects the principles of democratic education, which holds that the purpose of education is to produce and empower informed, critical, and productive democratic citizens that are prepared to work towards goals of equality and social justice.<sup>127</sup> As the education scholar Sonia Nieto points out, "Students need to be provided with an apprenticeship in democracy if they are to become critical and productive citizens."<sup>128</sup> This "apprenticeship in democracy" involves both learning about and practicing democracy in school. This means that curricula should include information on the "undemocratic, exclusionary, and even ugly side of our history"<sup>129</sup> as well as the successes of a democratic society, such as social movements and grass-roots organizing. It also means that schools should work to create "a learning environment that promotes critical thinking and supports agency for social change,"<sup>130</sup> because "[a] curriculum that avoids questioning school and society is not, as is commonly supposed, politically neutral. It cuts off the students' development as critical thinkers about their world."<sup>131</sup> When teachers and students are expected to suppress their thoughts and feelings about the Pledge of Allegiance, and recite it by rote every day regardless of their personal opinions, democracy suffers. When the Pledge functions as a site of surveillance and discipline, critical discussion is labeled as

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<sup>127</sup> Sonia Nieto, *Language, Culture, and Teaching*, 2nd ed. (New York City, New York: Routledge, 2010), 30.

<sup>128</sup> Nieto, *Language, Culture, and Teaching*, 32.

<sup>129</sup> Nieto, *Language, Culture, and Teaching*, 32.

<sup>130</sup> Nieto, *Language, Culture, and Teaching*, 46.

<sup>131</sup> Ira Shor, as quoted in Nieto, *Language, Culture, and Teaching*, 14.

suspicious and deviant and shut down. When teachers and students perform the Pledge out of a fear of getting in trouble, rather than a sincere desire to do so, obedience is encouraged over critical thinking and questioning authority. This type of learning environment produces students (and teachers) that obey commands and do not question the status quo. This type of learning environment does not produce “critical and productive citizens” that feel empowered to fight for equality and social justice.

In contrast, the three teachers I have highlighted, those that accept and encourage different interpretations of and responses to the Pledge, and use the Pledge as a way of inciting discussion and encouraging action, educate their students in the style of democratic education. These teachers promote critical thought in their classrooms, and accept the different opinions and beliefs of their students as valid. Furthermore, they encourage their students to take these beliefs and do work outside of the classroom to promote ideals of equality and social justice. As Tara said of her students that were inspired by Colin Kaepernick’s protest of the national anthem, and chose not to say the Pledge, “If you don’t stand in my third period English class, you know, it’s not gonna make or break, but what else can you do about that feeling outside of here?”<sup>132</sup>

By highlighting these three teachers, I do not mean to issue a judgment on the other teachers I spoke to, those that performed the ritual as expected of them and (to varying degrees) insisted their students do the same. Public school teachers have incredibly difficult and valuable jobs, for which they are underpaid and underappreciated. My critique of the way the Pledge of Allegiance is treated in classrooms- as a place of surveillance and discipline- is not a critique of individual teachers but rather of the state. The school, the classroom, and specifically, the Pledge of Allegiance, are spaces that are designed by the state to elicit discipline and obedience from

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<sup>132</sup> Tara Carroll, personal interview, November 22, 2016.

both teachers and students. Furthermore, it is the state that mandates the Pledge be said in public schools, and it is the state that ultimately benefits from the disciplining of student and teacher bodies during this ritual. The disciplined bodies of teachers and students serve the needs of the state, creating citizens that comply without questioning and do not challenge the status quo. In highlighting the way these three teachers treat the Pledge in their classrooms, I hope to show that this ritual *can* serve a productive purpose. Though the school classroom and the Pledge of Allegiance are set up so as to encourage the disciplining of student and teacher bodies, it is possible to co-opt the ritual, subverting its disciplinary aims and using it instead to incite critical discussion and encourage action that works towards goals of social justice. Though this was not the way I saw it functioning in most classrooms, Tara, Richard, and Deborah show that it is possible.

### Summary of Interview Findings

In interviewing teachers about their experiences, attitudes, and behaviors around the Pledge of Allegiance, I have come to see this ritual, as it is viewed and practiced today, as a form of and site for surveillance and discipline. These elements of disciplinary power came across in three ways. First, most, if not all, of the teachers I spoke with recall early experiences with the Pledge that indicate that, as children, they performed the ritual a way of following directions and remaining out of trouble. This suggests that it was performed for the sake of others, rather than themselves, and shows how even young children are aware of their own visibility and surveillance during this ritual. The feelings of anxiety and nervousness that these teachers remembered feeling in the presence of the Pledge reveals that surveillance and discipline effect not only the body (in enforcing certain behaviors and postures) but also the mind. I also found

that the Pledge continues to be experienced as a site of surveillance and discipline for these teachers in the classroom as adults. Many feel pressure to perform the Pledge because they are aware that their actions are visible to students, parents, the administration, and to some degree, the state, regardless of whether or not it holds meaning for them. Finally, teachers treat the Pledge as a site of surveillance and discipline in their own classrooms by using it as a means of monitoring, evaluating, and controlling student behavior.

The classroom is a place where multiple vectors of surveillance are constantly present. Students and teachers are in a position in the classroom to watch each other and to be watched by the school administration and the state. In this sense, that the Pledge of Allegiance functions as a site of surveillance and discipline in the classroom is not entirely surprising. Yet this reality is important because the Pledge has the potential of serving as the basis for rich and meaningful thought, discussion, and action. As I found in my interviews, the Pledge of Allegiance holds different meanings for different individuals, and discussions around the Pledge can bring to light questions of religious liberty, loyalty and patriotism, the relationship between the citizen and the state, civil disobedience, good citizenship, and activism. Most teachers would agree that part of their job is to help students develop critical thinking abilities so that they can go on to become informed, thoughtful, and active citizens. The Pledge of Allegiance has the potential to serve as the basis for important discussions that could help students develop these skills. However, when the Pledge functions as a surveillance mechanism, student and teacher bodies are disciplined, encouraging “correct” participation and discouraging any behavior that could be perceived as deviant or critical. This kind of surveillance and discipline shuts down the possibility of any meaningful discussions around the Pledge. The silencing of this discussion is not only a bad educational practice, it also fosters a culture in which any critical discussion of the state and its

practices is seen as suspicious, which works to uphold the status quo and make change more difficult. By accepting their students' choices and encouraging critical thought and conversation, Tara, Deborah, and Richard provide a model for situating the Pledge as a site of discussion rather than one of surveillance and discipline in the classroom.

## **V. Implications and Conclusion**

I have argued that the Pledge of Allegiance functions in American culture as a site of surveillance and discipline. I have shown that even at a young age, children understand that the Pledge is performed for an audience, and this feeling of being surveilled impacts children's emotional and affective response to the ritual, encouraging them to perform it "appropriately" and rewarding them when they do. In this way, bodies are disciplined at a young age to perform a ritual that they often do not understand, but that nonetheless works to uphold an oppressive system. I have also shown that this feeling of being watched does not only apply to young children. Adults continue to feel surveilled during the Pledge, and continue to react to that surveillance, both affectively and emotionally. Finally, I have shown that while teachers do face surveillance in the classroom during the Pledge, they also enact surveillance on students in a variety of ways. In this way, students and teachers face mutual surveillance in the classroom, and this visibility enables the disciplining of student and teacher bodies, encouraging uncritical shows of patriotism that fosters blind allegiance to the state and upholds the status quo.

That the Pledge is experienced and treated by many as a site of surveillance and discipline is important for a number of reasons. First, this ritual is held in high esteem in American culture. The Pledge is recited every day in most public schools, and efforts to curtail its influence are usually criticized as being "unpatriotic". The Pledge Protection Act is an example of this. The embodied actions called for during the Pledge also indicate the respect it is afforded: in standing, removing one's hat, placing a hand over the heart and looking up towards the flag, respect and deference are signaled. Given the respect this ritual is afforded in American culture, it is important to think through how it functions in practice, and if the way it functions lives up to the goals of a democratic society. As I have shown, the Pledge currently

functions as a tool of discipline and a site in which bodies are surveilled. Together, this surveillance and discipline enforces compliance with the ritual's expectations, whether the participants have a sincere desire to participate or not. This effect is especially important in regards to students, because of the way that the Pledge teaches young people to equate good citizenship with compliance and obedience. This value is obviously at odds with the needs of a healthy, just, and democratic society.

Secondly, that the Pledge functions as a site of surveillance and discipline is important because of the serious language it contains. In reciting the Pledge, one promises love and loyalty to the American nation state, a serious oath for children as young as five to be making every day. In the mind of its supporters, the Pledge serves as a reminder of the benefits and opportunities afforded to American citizens, and encourages participants to give back to their country with love and loyalty. Yet many react to the feeling of surveillance and discipline during this ritual emotionally, with anxiety and fear of doing something wrong. It is difficult to engage in meaningful reflection of one's nation's core principles while feeling anxious about performing the ritual 'correctly.' In this way, that the Pledge functions as a site of surveillance and discipline should concern even its staunchest supporters, as the emotions of anxiety and fear that surveillance brings about often make sincere reflection almost impossible.

That the Pledge functions as a site of surveillance is also important because surveillance, as I have shown, works affectively on the body, encouraging compliance rather than sincere thought and reflection. As theories of embodied cognition make clear, even the simple act of reciting the words and performing the actions to the Pledge can influence one's thoughts and cognitive state, by potentially inducing increased feelings of loyalty to and alignment with the state. This makes what I call "superficial participation"- reciting the words and embodying the

actions, without sincere feeling or thought- important and consequential. As I have shown, young children often engage in superficial participation, performing a ritual correctly despite not understanding the meaning of the words they are saying. Teachers also do this, saying the Pledge in front of their students because they feel pressure to do so by students, teachers, and the administration. A teacher's superficial participation can also influence his or her students. As many teachers acknowledge, a teacher is in a position of power and authority in the classroom, so that even if they do not enforce specific behavior during the Pledge, their behavior is taken as a cue by students. The sight of their teacher participating in the Pledge, whether it is meaningful to them or not, can influence students to say it as well as a way of gaining their teacher's approval, indicating that teachers have the ability to discipline student behavior without even meaning to. In saying the Pledge and performing the accompanying actions, the attitudes of both the students and the teacher can be influenced, potentially resulting in individuals feeling more ideologically aligned with and deferential towards the state. This is not to say that there is inherent danger or problems with individuals saying the Pledge of Allegiance if they so choose, but rather acknowledging that many say the Pledge as a form of compliance, as a way of appeasing the expectations of others, rather than a personal desire to do so, and that it is important to recognize the consequences of even superficial participation.

Superficial participation in these rituals is not only important on the individual level, but on the collective and symbolic level. Crossley posits that the performance of rituals embodies an understanding of social relationships, and also works to perpetuate them. He says, "To bow before an authority is to understand, in a practical and corporeal way, both the nature of authority in general and the nature of this specific authority before whom one is prostrate."<sup>133</sup> To stand,

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<sup>133</sup> Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique, and (inter)subjectivity," 39.



remove one's hat, turn to face the flag, put a hand over one's heart, and pledge allegiance, is to understand and acknowledge, to some degree, the authority granted to the government in the United States. This can be understood to different degrees. While adults may understand this on a more sophisticated level, children can understand that the flag, and the government and country it represents, is important and deserves respect because of the ceremonial nature of the Pledge as a ritual. Crossley also argues that the simple act of embodying deference is a means of legitimizing and perpetuating that relationship to authority. He says that to, for instance, bow before authority it to "affirm that structure, to communicate one's acceptance of it and thereby 'cast one's vote' in favor of its continuation."<sup>134</sup> In this way, the simple act of performing the Pledge, whether or not it is done with full understanding or sincerity, functions as a recognition and approval of the relationship the Pledge outlines between the citizen and the state.

This relationship is one of total and uncritical loyalty and allegiance. The Pledge requires citizens to support the American government whether they feel it is acting justly or not, whether it supports them or not. The United States government does not support all of its citizens. In fact, it often works to systematically oppress many of its citizens. In the United States, people of color, Native Americans, women, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ individuals face marginalization, oppression, and even death at the hands of the state. In the United States, African Americans are incarcerated at six times the rate of whites, and are systematically given harsher sentences for the same crimes. African Americans serve virtually the same amount of time in prison for drug offenses as whites do for violent offenses.<sup>135</sup> Women in the United States, especially women of color, are subject to domestic abuse and sexual assault that goes underreported and often unpunished. Native women in the United States are 2.5 times more

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<sup>134</sup> Crossley, "Ritual, Body Technique, and (inter)subjectivity," 39.

<sup>135</sup> "Criminal Justice Fact Sheet," NAACP.

likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than white women, mostly by non-native men.<sup>136</sup> Women in the United States earn eighty cents for every dollar that American men earn.<sup>137</sup> This disparity is even greater for women of color. African American women earn sixty-four cents for every dollar that white men make. Latina women make fifty-six cents for every dollar that white men make.<sup>138</sup> Trans people are murdered at much higher rates than cisgender people in the United States. In 2016, 27 trans people were murdered in the United States, most of whom were trans women of color.<sup>139</sup> Trans people, especially trans women of color, also experience higher rates of violence in their everyday lives than cisgender people, and have higher rates of suicide and homelessness than cisgender Americans. Given this reality, it is important that the Pledge, which asks citizens to ‘stand’ for a country that does not ‘stand’ for all of its citizens, does not function as a site of surveillance and discipline. When it functions in this manner, compliance becomes normalized and critical thought is shut down. If we are to educate students into the ideals of a truly just and democratic society, and encourage them to work towards goals of social justice, we must teach them to think critically about the role of the state in the systematic oppression of America’s most vulnerable communities. The normalization of compliance with the expectations of the Pledge, which asks citizens to withhold judgment and show uncritical loyalty to the state, teaches students that good citizenship looks like blind obedience, rather than thoughtful and critical action towards making the country a better place for all people.

I am not arguing that the Pledge of Allegiance has no place in American society. Though I take issue with much of its language, I admit that it holds great meaning for many Americans

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<sup>136</sup> "Maze of Injustice," Amnesty International.

<sup>137</sup> "Equal Pay & the Wage Gap Archives," National Women’s Law Center.

<sup>138</sup> "Women of Color in the United States." Catalyst.

<sup>139</sup> Alex Schmider, "GLAAD calls for increased and accurate media coverage of transgender murders," GLAAD, February 22, 2017.

and is not going to be done away with any time soon. Many supporters of the Pledge see it as an opportunity for meaningful personal reflection and a space of unity. These are laudable aspirations. Yet in speaking to Americans about the way that they experience this ritual, I have come to understand that the Pledge does not always function on a daily basis in this idealistic manner. Rather than functioning as a time for unity and reflection, this ritual is often viewed, experienced, and felt to be a site of surveillance and discipline, and a space in which feelings of anxiety and compliance prevail. When the Pledge functions in this way, participation is often a signal of compliance or a means of remaining inconspicuous. Yet even this kind of superficial participation, especially when it is uncritical, can work to legitimize and perpetuate a system that systematically oppresses millions of its citizens. Even those individuals I spoke with who view their own participation in the Pledge as meaningful and personally important often use the ritual as a space for enacting surveillance on others.

Though I see this ritual as functioning currently as a site of surveillance and control, I believe that it still holds potential for serving more inspirational functions. The Pledge has a rich history and complicated associations for many people. In the classroom, it can easily serve as a the basis for discussions on issues of patriotism and nationalism, religious liberty, civic protest, free speech, and the relationship between the citizen and the state. It can also inspire discussions about students' personal relationship with the United States, American culture, and the US government. Teachers can encourage students to use the Pledge as a way of reflecting on and representing their thinking about these issues. In this way, the Pledge of Allegiance has the potential to function as a site of critical thought and questioning, rather than one of surveillance, discipline, and control.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> I use the term “American” here to describe anyone that lives in the United States or identifies with the term ‘American’. It does not refer exclusively to citizens or exclusively to full-time residents. However, it does refer exclusively to the United States, rather than North America.

<sup>ii</sup> The following are the core interview questions that I asked all of my respondents:

- When I say “The United States of America,” what are a few words that come to mind for you?
- What does the American flag mean to you? What does it represent?
- Can you describe your first experience with the Pledge or the national anthem?
  - Where/when was it?
  - How did it make you feel?
- How did you learn the pledge and the anthem? Where did you learn them? Who taught them to you?
- What is the line from the national anthem/ pledge you best remember? Why?
- Do you remember the last time you said the pledge or sung the anthem or were in a place where other people did? Can you describe the experience?
  - Where/when was it?
  - Did you stand, put your hand over your heart, did you say/sing it?
  - How did it make you feel?
  - Do you remember anyone around you at the time? What were they doing, what did they look like?
- Why do you say the pledge/sing the anthem (if you do)?
- What does the pledge mean to you? How about the anthem? Do they mean different things to you?
- Do you think that all Americans should say the pledge and sing the anthem? Why?
- Do you consider yourself patriotic?
- What does it mean to be patriotic?
- How do you express your patriotism?

<sup>iii</sup> This project initially was also about the national anthem, which is why the interview questions ask about both rituals. I had originally planned on interviewing teachers and athletes on their experiences with the Pledge and the anthem respectively, but my interviews with teachers were much more fruitful than those with athletes. Due to time constraints and for the sake of focus and clarity, I decided to center the project on the Pledge of Allegiance. Though I do think that much of the argument I make about the Pledge could be extended to the national anthem, that argument is broader than the scope of this project.



iv

Students saluting the American flag as it was commonly done before WWII

<sup>v</sup> I recognize that these concepts are not exclusively *American* values, and furthermore that not all Americans consider these valuable. I use the term simply to suggest that these concepts are often thought of, in the American Exceptionalist discourse, as uniquely American and sacred. The sidelining of these ‘values’ in the protection of American patriotic symbols is therefore somewhat ironic.

<sup>vi</sup> Though the Pledge of Allegiance is performed in settings other than the school classroom (such as naturalization ceremonies and Board of Education meetings), I have chosen to focus my analysis in this paper to the setting of the Public school classroom. This is where the majority of Americans have encountered the Pledge of Allegiance, and also is most relevant to the individuals I interviewed, who all work in public schools.

<sup>vii</sup> All names have been changed to protect the privacy of my respondents.

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